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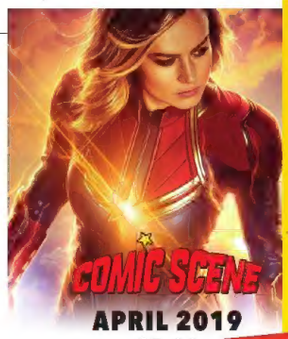


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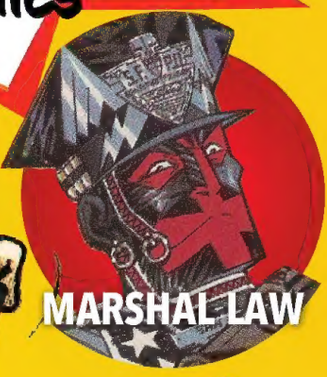

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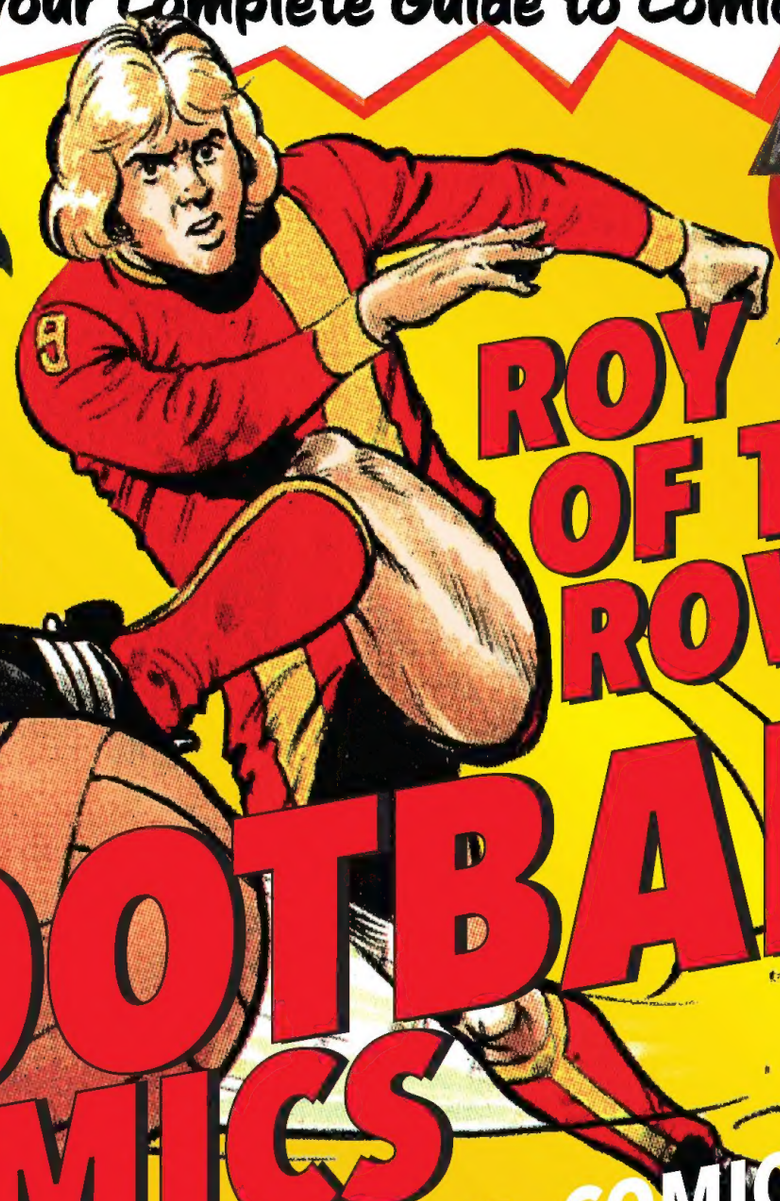

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# COMIC SCENE

Your Complete Guide to Comics

# FABULOUS FIRST ISSUE

Welcome to the very first monthly issue of ComicScene Magazine available on newsstands such as WHSmith, McColls and Easons (Ireland) - the only magazine based in the UK dedicated to comics, comic culture and comic movies and TV.

There have been several issues before this available by subscription and in specialist comic shops and if you want to catch up there is a 400+ page ComicScene Digi Pack available at our online shop **www.comicscene.tictail.com**

As we were putting this issue together we heard about another great comic creator passing away. As we are a celebration of the comic medium we thought we would forego our usual editorial and contents page to celebrate the life of Ron Smith.

Enjoy the Issue. We'd love to hear what you think. We encourage you to write to us at comicsflix@gmail.com for a future letters page.

Yours aye, Tony.

**ComicScene UK Volume 2 Issue 1 April 2019**
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## REMEMBERING **RON SMITH** 1928-2019

Many talented comic artists have turned their hand to the challenge of drawing the brutal 22nd century lawman, Judge Dredd. Few, however, have done it with such style and distinction or so often as Ron Smith, who has died at the age of 90.

Ron first took on Judge Dredd in 1979, two years after the strip started, finishing off the epic, The Day The Law Died! in which Mega City One is taken over by the arrogant and insane Chief Judge Cal. Although Ron didn't create the character, his artwork certainly represented an important stage in the evolution of Judge Dredd, the character and the story. Observers noted approvingly that Ron tended to emphasise the lawman's physical stature, rather than exaggerating the many features of his futuristic costume as other many artists did.

Ron had some tough acts to follow, producing art for the strip initially at the same time as such Mega City luminaries as Brian Bolland, Garry Leach, Mike McMahon, Steve Dillon and Carlos Ezquerra. Ron Smith's style was more understated than some, but it was also very distinctive. Ron became a consistently reliable figure, sometimes finishing off Mega epics like The Judge Child and Blockmania started by other artists. He soon became the most prolific Judge Dredd artist of all.

He also undeniably made his mark with a number of memorable and enduring creations. He was always good with dinosaurs and some have hailed his early work on The Blood of Satanus as his best Dredd work. It was also Ron who first drew the young Marlon Shakespeare aka 'Chopper' in Unamerican Graffiti, initially, a sort of 22nd century version of Banksy and one of Dredd's most enduring and popular adversaries.

Ron also had a genius for producing grotesques such as Otto Sump and the obese heavyweights of the League of Fatties, Dave the Orangutan mayor of Mega City One in Death of a Politician, Pug Ugly And The Bugglys, the Starborn Thing and Citizen Snork. Otto Sump, originally conceived as a bizarre parody of Citizen Kane, proved a particularly popular creation. Sump, a hideously ugly but good-natured man set up a range of beauty clinics across Mega City One with the aim of ensuring nobody would ever have to be as ugly as he was. However, when Sump proved hopelessly incompetent as a surgeon, ultimately making his customers even uglier than they had been before, he inadvertently started a new fad for extreme ugliness, making himself rich in the process. The story led to a series of Otto Sump "Stay Ugly!" t-shirts in the 1980s.

From 1981, Ron and writers John Wagner and Alan Grant produced a separate and distinct Judge Dredd strip for the Daily Star. Ron Smith's concise style suited the tabloid newspaper format perfectly. It became one of the longest running of any such strips in British newspaper history, lasting until the mid-1990s *(Continues Page 5).*

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Dredd writer, Alan Grant, in particular was impressed by Ron's speed. In the book, Thrill-Power Overload: Thirty Years of 2000 AD, Grant quotes Ron as explaining how he worked:

"It's easy. It all depends on the money I'm being paid. I know my page rate. I know how much I want to earn per hour. So, I set my alarm clock and start drawing a page. When my alarm goes off, the page is finished." Grant added: "He realised he was never going to get rich, so he opted for volume."

Ron Smith's career was not just about Judge Dredd, however. He also drew episodes of Rogue Trooper, Tharg's Futureshocks and Harlem Heroes for the Galaxy's Greatest Comic. His writer for Chronos Carnival, Hilary Robinson described him in Thrill-Power Overload: Forty Years of 2000 AD as "a real gentleman & true professional."

Ron Smith was not just about 2000AD either, indeed born in Bournemouth in 1924, he was in his fifties when 2000AD first appeared in 1977. Initially studying to be an engineer like his father, Ron served as World War II Spitfire pilot, seeing action in Europe as part of the Army Co-operation Air Squadron. After the war, he dabbled in animation before getting his first comics work on titles such as Sun, Knockout and Comet. From 1951 and 1972, he lived in Dundee producing vast amounts of diverse and varied artwork for Beano and Dandy publishers, DC Thomson.

Amongst other things, Ron drew Adventure strips and worked for Topper and Hotspur. He also helped co-create the popular British superhero character, King Cobra.

He later moved back to Surrey. He produced painted album covers for the bands, Def Leppard and Sigue Sigue Sputnik. In the 1980s, in addition to his 2000AD work, he drew for the comics Mask, Transformers and Zoids.

'We all follow the Yellow Brick Road,' Ron said in an interview in 2009, 'we're all off to see the wizard and you should just stay on course, even if people say it's a bloody stupid thing to do – if you're genetically programmed, bloody go for it. It's all part of that road… and this has been a part of mine. Yet there but for the grace of God go I.'

Ron Smith retired in the 1990s following problems with his eyesight. He later suffered from Parkinson's disease.

The current editor of 2000AD, Matt Smith (no relation to Ron) has written about the artist since his death on January 10th, 2019:

'Ron was one of the artistic stalwarts of 2000 AD during the 1980s, and his Judge Dredd strips in particular were instrumental in making the Galaxy's Greatest the cult, counter-cultural game-changer that redefined British comics. Like Carlos Ezquerra, his style was uniquely his own – you never mistook a Ron Smith strip – and he filled his panels with comical grotesques, his Mega-City One full of living, breathing loons. Capable of amazingly detailed work – check out his episodes of Block Mania, where he dealt with thousands of rioting citizens – and professional to a fault, it's no wonder he was one of Tharg's regular go-to Dredd guys. A 2000 AD legend, he will be greatly missed by fans and fellow creators alike.'

Ron Smith's death comes after that of fellow Dredd artists Brett Ewins in 2015, Steve Dillon in 2016 and Carlos Ezquerra in 2018. He married twice and had four daughters.

Chris Hallam.

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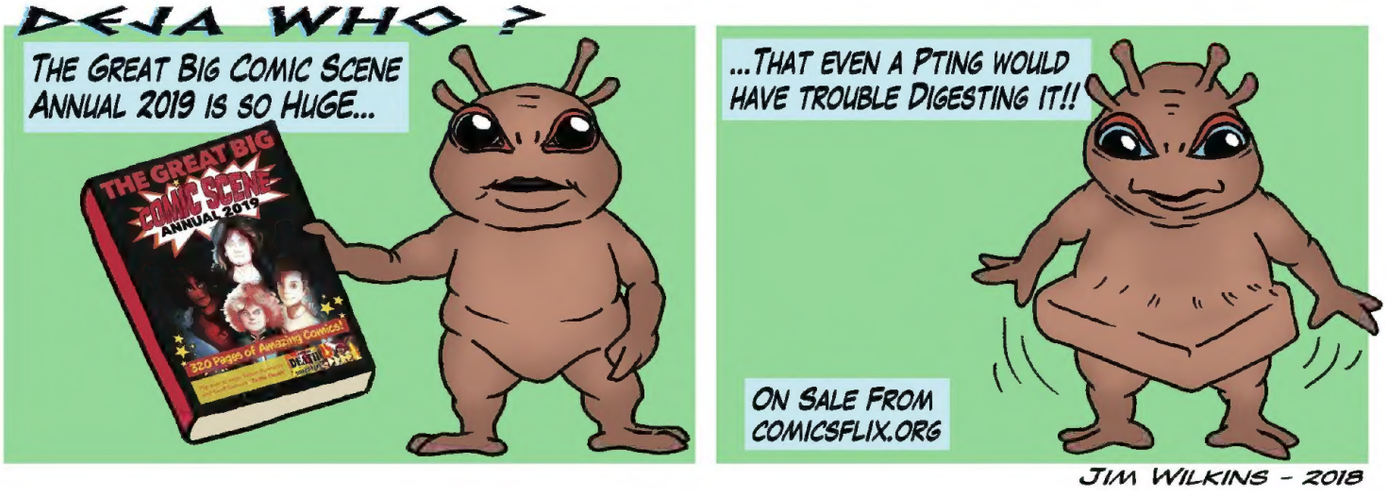
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# WHERE'S MY COLLECTION OF "THE TOMORROW PEOPLE"

Given the number of comics and comic characters published in the United Kingdom – and that are still being published – you may be surprised to learn that one of the most frequent questions I get asked on social media is: "Who owns XXX?" followed by "Why doesn't someone reprint it?"

"XXX" of course should be replaced any of ComicScene's many readers favourite comic strips or characters probably last published in the 1990s, and perhaps, many before that, be that Captain Crucial, i-Spy, House of Dollman, Janus Stark or Skid Solo.

Often, the answer is easy (and it's even easier since Rebellion first bought classic characters including Roy of the Rovers from Egmont in 2016 and followed that up by buying rights to the rest of the "Fleetway Comics" strips and characters from TI Media, formerly IPC, last year).

With the help of numerous comics archivists, and comic company records, I've documented them in considerable detail on downthetubes.net, but that doesn't stop people asking the same question, most recently about the "Minder" strip in the short-lived anthology TV Tops, which also featured a strip about pop star Adam Ant as a time-travelling adventurer. (No, really, it did).

However, while the current ownership of many British characters first published in comics is usually easy enough to source, it can get trickier when you're trying to reprint a strip based on a TV series. As a general rule of thumb, no matter what publisher first delivered you a comic strip based on your favourite show or film, it's usually the property owner that owns the rights to that strip. For example, the BBC licenses Doctor Who, so if you aren't the current license holder, in the first instance you need to talk to BBC Worldwide, who handle the licensing of BBC shows, about reprinting any strips. Of course that would be just the start – if you wanted to republish the "Doctor Who" strips from the 1960s and 70s comic TV Comic, or Countdown, you'd have to also discuss that with rights holders Panini UK, who purchased them when they bought up Marvel UK in the mid 1990s, and you'd certainly have to talk to them if you wanted to reprint any strips from Doctor Who Magazine, too.

However, as an added wrinkle in the case of Doctor Who, if the strips you're looking to reprint feature a TV monster, such as the Daleks, you might also have to get an agreement to reprint a strip from the writer (or their agent) who created the monsters for TV – which adds to the cost and is one reason "The Daleks" from the 1960s comic TV Century 21 has only seen limited reprint and certainly not the high end hardback book several publishers have tried to publish over the last 20 years.

The fun doesn't stop there, either. Depending on what agreement over use of likeness was struck between an actor's agent and the BBC, for example, it might be that if you wanted to reprint the Patrick Troughton Doctor Who strips, you'd also have to negotiate detail with that actor's estate, via their agents. All of which of course adds to the editorial cost, potentially making any reprint a very uncommercial proposition.

The good news is that in the case of a good many shows originally produced by ITV or ITV companies, or by US TV companies, in the past, most actors had very limited say in the use of their likeness in licensed products, including comics. So, if you're looking to reprint My Favourite Martian from TV Century 21, most strips drawn by Bill Titcombe, all you'd need to do is get an agreement from Chertok TV, who made the show – the company still exists. The bad news is that in the case of some strips based on TV series, such as The Man from U.N.C.L.E., which had a fantastic strip in Lady Penelope comic, things get complicated, because the ownership of the original show has been mired in legal wrangling for years. (Which is almost certainly why the Men from U.N.C.L.E. in DC's Batman '66 meets The Man from U.N.C.L.E. comic seem modelled on Guy Ritchie's 2015 movie).

Then there are the properties that are based on TV shows where the property owner simply isn't interested in negotiating a reprint of a popular strip. There are a couple at least from Look-In – a title now owned by Rebellion – that have fallen foul of that particular issue. Hopefully that problem is something of a rarity, but if you're a fan of Sapphire and Steel, for example, that's why, sadly. we've yet to see Angus Allan and Arthur Ranson's amazing strips collected.

Let's not even get started on comics based on properties where the original copyright owner seems to have vanished, or who you think might be the current property owner has no idea if they own the rights or not. (Want to see a collection of Marvel UK's Zoids, some strips written by Grant Morrison? Good luck with that one... and don't even start asking who owns "Countdown" from Countdown comic, beautifully drawn by 2000AD stalwart John Michael Burns, originally published by Polystyle, that brand, thanks to acquisitions down the years, now owned by Mirror Newspapers… But features spaceship designs from 2001: A Space Odyssey, necessitating, possibly, rights negotiations with the estate of not only director Stanley Kubrick as well as Warner, who own MGM, and, perhaps, the estate of Sir Arthur C. Clarke, too!).

Even if you are a publisher determined enough to gain all the necessary agreements for a collection based on a favourite TV show, one last hurdle is finding copies of the comics where that strip appeared, because it's unlikely you'll find the artwork.

So, for those of you still determined to ask me why we've yet to see a collection of "The Tomorrow People" from Look-In, hopefully you'll now understand why I start to twitch uncontrollably when that question is asked on whichever social media you pose it...

• For a detailed listing of who owns what British comics and characters visit this page on downthetubes - downthetubes.net/?page_id=101053

## NUTS & BOLTS RAVINGS FROM INSIDE THE COMICS PUBLISHING INDUSTRY

**Author:** John Freeman
**Twitter:** @johnfreeman_dtt
**Website:** downthetubes.net
**John is currently writing Crucible**

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# The **Last Son** of Krypton...

*Elliot S. Maggin's novel lets the 1970s **Superman** soar*

One item amongst the tide of merchandising released around Superman: The Movie in 1978 didn't mention the film on its cover or anywhere else—not in its UK edition, anyway. It didn't even seem to be set in the same universe, although British readers of Superman comics at the time knew about Morgan Edge and Steve Lombard and Galaxy Communications, names that Superman: The Movie opted to bypass so as to get back to basics. They knew who Elliot S. Maggin was too, from the occasions when a DC comic written by him arrived on the other side of the Atlantic, usually drawn by Curt Swan. But to anyone who read comics for the writing as much as the art, anyone for whom prose novels about comics characters to go on the shelves between the sci-fi and fantasy paperbacks was an irresistible treat, Maggin's novel The Last Son of Krypton was a treasured item even before it reached the end of Krypton and the end of chapter one.

The book originated from Maggin's proposed treatment for a Superman film, written when such a thing was a distant prospect, before it eventually emerged as a tie-in novel, complete with an image of Christopher Reeve on its US cover. But it's a very different animal, filled with a personal–in fact parental–love of the characters that feels different from the communal affection conjured up by the movie. The film's creative team were studiously trying to do justice to a beloved icon, while Maggin's canvas was as broad as it got, servicing the whole Superman mythology itself, in breadth and depth.

Unrestrained by budget or the need to make anyone believe a man can fly–Maggin's readers needed no convincing–the plot roams across time and space. It starts on Krypton, moves to Earth, and travels to Oric, a planet orbiting the star Vega which is on course to become the economic centre of a galactic sector, but which also has a history dark enough to have once prompted a police action from the Green Lantern Corps. A narrative detour to the 1940s involves Albert Einstein, and the delicious idea that Jor-El took steps to contact the keenest scientific mind on Earth prior to baby Kal-El's arrival. Eventually an alien despot called The Master launches a plan based on time travel that will reshape the Milky Way galaxy itself.

Maggin also took the opportunity to reconfigure his own comics work via the book. He reintroduces a four-armed alien minstrel named Towbee, a very Bronze Age comedic agent of chaos created for an issue of Action Comics in 1973, now played in a more serious vein. And most of all he makes Lex Luthor the effective co-star of the book. The story's version of Superman is a clever splice of comics and film versions, the fortitude of one and the smiling empathy of the other; but Maggin's Luthor leaves the movie's namesake trailing in the dust, a mere outline sketch.

Last Son of Krypton is Luthor's biography as much as Kal-El's, a theme the author probes in flashbacks to young Lex's anguish–the birth agonies of a genius in a world totally unready for his arrival. In 1975's Superman #292, Maggin and Swan had just five panels to show Luthor's turning point, his creation of artificial life and its almost immediate death. In the book, the trauma is described at length, in high-altitude prose: "Luthor got far enough to feel the heat, to feel a hot prickling sensation over his exposed skin, to see the bowlful of living protoplasm he had created with his mind and hands and livid soul die the death that Lex, at that moment, wanted to die."

Language like that brings to mind another writer who dug under the skin of the DC universe. As comics critic Colin Smith has pointed out, there's no real evidence that Last Son of Krypton was ever an influence on Alan Moore, but the book's poetics and psychology and love of language seem to predict the high rhetoric and darker characterisations lying in comics' near future, once the 1980s British Invasion got underway. Maggin's real alignment, though, was with his character's past, with Mort Weisinger's era of impossible twists on familiar events, the infinite universe of Superman imaginary tales and their sci-fi dreamscapes where nothing was out of bounds; energies Moore also plugged into as soon as he had the chance.

Some recent Superman stories have echoed Maggin's thoughts too. The film Batman v Superman wondered about a population looking to Superman for salvation while he floats in the sky like a messiah. Maggin's more nuanced look at the same thing finds Lois Lane telling a psychologist that she no longer expects to die in any threatening situation. "It is my contention," concludes the shrink, "that Superman may be singlehandedly bringing the social development of our entire human race to a grinding halt." Kal-El, it turns out, has wondered the same thing.

Maggin eventually wrote three more solo Superman prose stories, including one told from the perspective of Krypto the Superdog, and they all have that feeling of characters with ethics and intelligence, as well as an easy assumption of those qualities in a reader too. Most prose superhero novels are interested in recreating the things seen on the comics page, or in jocular tales of high adventure–the Marvel Novel Series that followed in Maggin's wake during 1979 did both of those well–but Maggin was interested in adding things normally invisible, and in saying things usually left unsaid. Spurred into life by the film, he created a Superman who flies even higher than Christopher Reeve.

**"The *Last Son of Krypton* was a treasured item even before it reached the end of Krypton & the end of chapter one"**

**Author:** Tim Hayes
**Twitter:** @pistolerosa
**Website:** timhayes.net

# OLIVER

Originally his calling call as an aspiring screenwriter, Garry Whitta has finally succeeded in bringing his futuristic update of Charles Dickens' classic 1837-second novel Oliver Twist to life after almost two decades of development. But rather than appearing on the big screen, Oliver has now been turned into a twelve part Image comic book series, released in four-issue arcs, which is illustrated by Transmetropolitan artist, Darick Robertson.

"Oliver was one of the first things I wrote as a feature film screenplay when I was first trying to break into the movie business as a writer about fifteen years ago," recalls Whitta, whose credits now include The Book of Eli, co-writing M. Night Shyamalan's After Earth and developing the story for Rogue One. "It's what got me my foot in the door with an agent and manager but at the time the feeling was that the script was too big and ambitious to sell from a 'baby' writer,' as I was at the time, so while it kickstarted my career, it just kind of sat on the shelf. But the story has always stuck with me and I really wanted to find a way to tell it in one form or another, and it occurred to me that structurally it might break down really well into a comic book series."

The problem for Whitta was that apart from being a reader, he knew next to nothing about the comic book medium. "I certainly had no idea how to go about making one," he continues. "But one thing I did know was that I'd need an artist to collaborate with, and I had long been a fan of Darick Robertson, mainly through his work on Transmetropolitan. So I contacted him out of the blue, fully expecting him to tell me to get stuffed, as I was sure he would have received unsolicited queries from writers all the time. But as it turns out, Darick is one of the nicest people you could ever hope to meet, and he really sparked to the idea when I told him about Oliver. I think as an artist he saw the visual potential, that it would be a lot of fun for him to draw."

But while Oliver piqued his interest, Robertson was unable to commit to the series at that early stage. "Gary first reached out to me when I was still living in New York back in 2002," adds Robertson. "He had the screenplay and the idea to make it into a comic. But I wasn't in a position to take it on then, as I was still working monthly on Transmetropolitan and had just taken on regular art duties for Wolverine at Marvel. But we became friends and stayed in touch."

Formally agreeing to collaborate on Oliver in 2004, Robertson was initially unable to contribute much beyond a few character sketches. But with Robertson later relocating to the Bay Area where Whitta also lives, the pair worked slowly but steadily on the project over the next fifteen years. "Being an indie book, I've had to take on other work while creating this, in order to protect our rights and vision, so during that time I've had some successful runs of mainstream titles as well as co-creating The Boys with Garth Ennis and Happy! with Grant Morrison while working to create Oliver and to launch the book at the right time at the right publisher," says Robertson. "Image is the perfect home for it and I couldn't be happier with the patience and timing its needed to get us here. Gary has since shown the world what I saw in his work over a decade ago, and I'm excited that this book is finally going to be out there for everyone to see."

Reimaging the titular orphan as "a post-apocalyptic superhero fighting to liberate a war-ravaged England while searching for the truth about his own mysterious origins," the pair haven't stuck religiously to Dickens's original plot, instead using it more as a springboard for their own story, although those familiar with the book or the numerous film and television adaptations - or indeed the popular stage musical - will spot some familiar faces.

"They're mostly allegories for the cast in the original novel," explains Robertson. "It's very much it's own world and the story is quite original. One of the things that attracted me to Gary's story was his ability to create a world separate from the original Dickens story but still with familiar touchstones and moments. Gary has found a way to make these characters exist more within a superhero-style universe, resulting in something I believe is pretty unique."

Robertson has also spent considerable time coming up with the distinctive look of Oliver's devastated future London. "I've been free to bring my own ideas and really bring Gary's vision to the page, while having the freedom and ultimately fun to do my own thing," he reflects. "I've been able to bring my A-game to the detail and the designs, as we've had time to create this world together. With Oliver, I'm devoted to bring the scope of the destruction and the tangible nature of realistic backgrounds based on reference photos of London in order to create an atmosphere wherein the reader hopefully feels enmeshed in the brutal and dystopian world wherein Oliver exists."

"Darick really put a tremendous amount of effort and research into designing the world of Oliver," adds Whitta. "He went to London with his sketchbook and took down tons of reference for the various parts of the city that Oliver inhabits in the comic. And beyond that he came up with the genius idea of bringing a kind of Steampunk-inspired vibe to the look of the world. I'd describe it as retro-futuristic, but the Steampunk influence makes so much sense because it has the same roots in the Victorian era as this adaptation does."

> "Reimaging the titular orphan as a post-apocalyptic superhero fighting to liberate a war-ravaged England"

**Author:** Stephen Jewell
**Twitter:** @stephenjewell
**Stephen writes for SFX, Total Film & the Megazine**

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# WHACKOMAN!

## BY MARC JACKSON

LAST TIME... WHACKOMAN DECIDED TO REMOVE BUGSYS' ARM WITH A CHAINSAW. HOWEVER, BUGSY REALLY WASN'T KEEN...

ON TOP OF BUGSYS' ROOF...
WHY ARE WE ON TOP OF MY BUILDING, PEDRO?
WELL, BUGSY, SEEING AS THOUGH YOU WERE SUCH A BIG BABY AND WOULDN'T LET ME GIVE YOU A BIONIC ARM, I NEED TO TRAIN YOU TO BE A SUPER-HERO JUST LIKE MOI!

YOU AREN'T A SUPER-HERO! YOU'RE A RAVING LUNATIC IN A STUPID COSTUME!
LUCKILY, THANKS TO ONES' DOUBLE-STRENGTH SUPER COWL, I CANNOT HEAR YOUR CRUEL WORDS, BUGSY.

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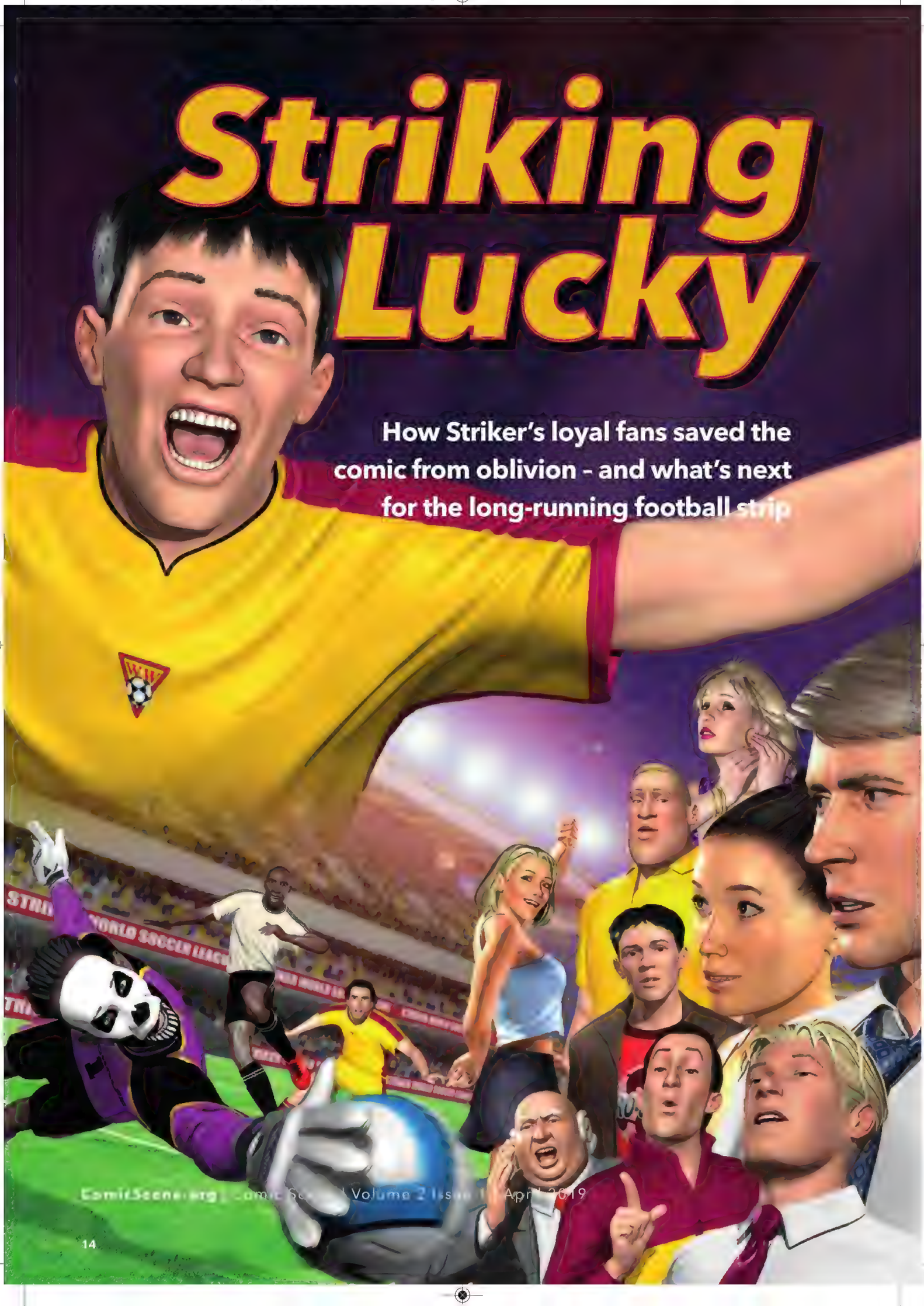
# Striking Lucky

**How Striker's loyal fans saved the comic from oblivion – and what's next for the long-running football strip**



While many ComicScene readers may have never read it, Striker – first published in The Sun newspaper back in November 1985, created by journalist Pete Nash – is one of the most popular comics in the UK. It's read by millions of fans, in The Sun, online and, more recently, in the revived Striker comic, which is now on its second run and on sale in all good newsagents across the country.

John Freeman caught up with creator and publisher Pete Nash to talk to him about the comic, and his astonishing success raising thousands through Kickstarter to bring the title back into newsagents...

***ComicScene:*** *So, another successful Kickstarter to bring fans another 12 issues of Striker comic. That's an incredible achievement, given you raised just over £45,000 in just two weeks to keep the comic going. Were you a just a little taken aback at the support from Striker fans?*

***Pete Nash:*** Yes, I wasn't at all sure that we'd do it. And to be honest, there was a part of me that wouldn't have been overly disappointed if we'd failed to reach our target because the workload of publishing 12 weekly comics with the help of just two full-time staff had really taken its toll. 80 and 90 hour weeks had become the norm, which isn't sustainable, so this new crowdfunding was a litmus test to see whether the existing support was strong enough to justify continuing.

The first Kickstarter raised £43,700 in four weeks from 1,026 fans, while this one raised £45,022 in two weeks from 1,128 backers. More subscribers came on board after the first Kickstarter ended and people are re-subscribing now. That's very heartening and shows we can now build for the future from a solid bedrock of fans.

***ComicScene:*** *Publication resumed in January, and this time around you've built in funding for more promotion - will that all be at retail level, to encourage newsagents to stock the title?*

***Pete:*** There's enough funding built in for a small level of retail promotion but what's really needed now is investment. People have money to invest and this latest crowdfunding will show them that our fans like our product, and that's really important. Investment will enable us to develop strategies to improve our product and find new fans.

Getting Striker into more shops is one thing, but that's not much use if it's hidden behind other titles and people don't know it's there. That's where marketing and advertising come in.

I'd also like to get Striker into comic shops in 2019 but that's a different process and not something I have experience of.

***ComicScene:*** *The first twelve issues of Striker published in 2018 hit a couple of roadblocks - not least of them distribution problems early on. Do you think the way distribution of magazines to the news stand is run is part of the reason people are buying less of them, as well as the rise of the web?*

***Pete:*** The newsstand industry doesn't run as smoothly as it could but that's probably not surprising when you consider the various levels of logistics that are involved. I don't attribute the demise of comics to distribution issues or the internet - in my opinion, it's because there is so much diversity now in the entertainment industry. It used to be comics and books, TV with two channels or films at the cinema - now you have movies on demand, thousands of TV channels, computer games and social media all competing for attention.

That doesn't mean the end of comics, just a dilution of the fan base. It's a challenge, but niche industries can still be profitable.

***ComicScene:*** *Are there any changes to the line-up of strips and features in the works for this second series of Striker?*

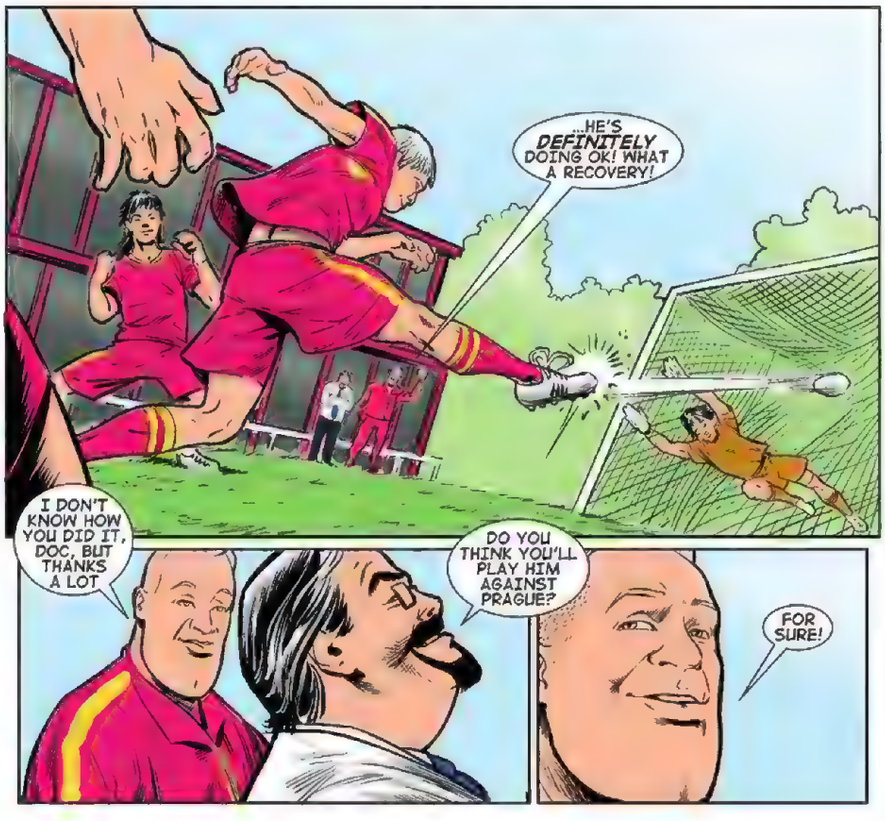
***Pete:*** I am always looking to improve the product so yes, there will be some changes. At the moment we have the main story created in 3D software, plus a second strip that's hand-drawn and also an illustrated text serial. Issue 13 will see the introduction of a third Striker comic serial.

I also want to have a sharper focus on the weekly Warbury Warriors matches. Ideally, this would be done as a comic strip but for now the games will be featured as a text story with illustrations.

There will also be a couple of pages of classic comedy strips from Striker's 34-year archive.

***ComicScene:*** *Despite being a football comic, a lot of the action in the main strip takes place off the field, with the footballers pitted against gangsters, for example, as well as facing many other challenges, some of them personal. Have you moved the strip away from the field in part because Striker has a lot of its football action "live", in the animated spin-off that's seen the creation of the "World League" and more? Or has Striker always been about the players rather than the game?*

***Pete:*** Striker's success has been built on the storylines rather than the football action, but I do think the fans would like to see a bit more about the weekly matches in print, hence my decision to feature these as weekly stories in future. The animated games have brought a new dimension to the football, but they haven't been as good as I hoped they would be. I still think animation will play a major role but for now its importance is secondary.


...HE'S DEFINITELY DOING OK! WHAT A RECOVERY!
I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU DID IT, DOC, BUT THANKS A LOT
DO YOU THINK YOU'LL PLAY HIM AGAINST PRAGUE?
FOR SURE!

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I'M SORRY, LI... THIS IS ONE HELL OF A MESS I'VE LANDED US IN
THE WORLD LEAGUE IS A GOOD IDEA, NICK... WE CAN MAKE IT WORK
HOW? IF WE TELL THE POLICE ABOUT THE MONEY LAUNDERING, CARLTON WILL FRAME US AND TAKE US DOWN WITH HIM...
...IF WE TRY TO STOP IT OURSELVES BY APPOINTING AN INDEPENDENT BODY TO RUN THE LEAGUE, HE'LL KILL US...

"My 3D artist, Simon Ravenhill, still reads comics and is a huge fan of The Walking Dead"

***ComicScene:*** *How did Striker begin and why do you think it's continued to be such a success?*

***Pete:*** I never imagined Striker would still be going 34 years after I created it. I didn't start it because I specifically wanted to do a football comic - it was more a question of trying to identify a gap in the market. There was a glut of sci-fi strips in 1985 and while Roy of the Rovers was still going, it was stuck in a time warp. I thought a new football strip aimed at adults would be more popular so that's what I created.

I was working as a journalist on The Sun at the time, so it was easy to show the first strips to the then editor, Kelvin Mackenzie. He wasn't impressed by my raw artwork but he decided to give it a go and dropped a strip called Axa to make way for it.

I always put a lot of effort into the storylines and dialogue, and I think that's the main reason Striker has endured. The football has always been secondary. The strip has pathos because it's heavily character-driven. And it's often unpredictable because of its mix of comedy and hard drama.

There have been moments in the past when I wished I'd ended it permanently because of the demanding deadlines but now I'm glad I didn't. The rug can always be pulled under your feet, but I'm optimistic that great opportunities lie ahead. Plans for developing an online Striker social game are taking shape and provided we can maintain and grow sales of Striker, I would also like to publish our first non-football comic towards the end of 2019 or early 2020.

***ComicScene:*** *Striker remains one of the very few British comic strips to have gone*

*the route of "3D" art, which seems to be part of its success. Do you think that's in part down to, perhaps, that much of Striker's fanbase aren't regular comic readers and more accepting of the style? (I'm thinking here that perhaps many of them may be more used to the graphics of computer games and so more accepting of Striker's look more than regular comic readers might be).*

***Pete:*** It's fair to say many of Striker's fans aren't regular comic readers but most of them wouldn't care whether the artwork was drawn or computer-generated. After all, Striker was hand-drawn for the first 14 of its 34 years. It's also fair to say that most traditional comic fans do not like 3D-generated art. They think it's not real art and they like to see the names of the individual pencil artists, inkers, colourers and letterers. I get that but it doesn't bother me because I changed Striker to a computer-generated comic for a reason - to ultimately reduce production costs.

In 1999, when Striker effectively became the world's first comic to be entirely computer-generated, the cost was well over £400 per page and the quality wasn't great. Now the quality is much higher, but the costs have halved - and continue to come down because productivity has increased. In a world where comics have become a small industry, that's hugely important because it means we can become a publisher of many small-selling titles but still make a significant profit. At least that's the plan!

***ComicScene:*** *Are there any plans for the main strip you can tease our readers with at this stage, or do you prefer to let them wait and see? There looks to be quite a showdown coming among the crime lords who are making Nick's life hell…*

***Pete:*** Yes, there is a showdown coming up because the creation of a World League in Striker created an opportunity for international gangsters to use it as a front for money laundering. Nick and his billionaire wife Li Ming can't expose it because they'll either end up dead or in jail because they could be framed. Their only hope is to put their trust in another gangster, a lawyer and ruthless football agent called Juan Pablo Astuto.

***ComicScene:*** *Did you read any particular comics as you grew up that helped shape your comics writing - and do you read any now?*

***Pete:*** My favourite comics as a kid were the Eagle, Valiant and Beano but I wouldn't say any of them had an influence on me. My writing experience came from being a tabloid journalist on Fleet Street, where it was important to write concisely but compellingly. I do occasionally look at comics now, but it's only to look at the quality of art and writing rather than as a fan.

My 3D artist, Simon Ravenhill, still reads comics and is a huge fan of The Walking Dead.

***ComicScene:*** *Ever since the first Striker weekly back in 2005, you've harboured a desire to expand the work of your team to encompass other genres - and you wrote and drew "Psycops" for The Sun, with later stories drawn by 2000AD's John Michael Burns, and created did some test work on a "War of the Worlds" strip. Are there any plans to revive these ambitions?*

***Pete:*** Absolutely. Two years ago, The Sun pleaded poverty and slashed the fee it paid for Striker, which enabled me to discover my entrepreneurial spirit and use Striker as a launch pad for what will hopefully be a successful publishing business. It's not going to be easy but I'm very lucky to have such a loyal fan base.

If we can stabilize and then grow sales of the weekly Striker comic, that will give us a solid platform from which we can start publishing new titles. I have at least half a dozen ideas that I'd like to develop but I also want to give opportunities to other writers and artists.

***ComicScene:*** *Outside of the Striker comic, we have the live action games, the ongoing collections - are there any other Striker-related projects in the works that have now spurred investors, given the two hugely successful Kickstarters that illustrate how strong your fan base is?*

***Pete:*** I am putting a lot of hope in the development of a Striker online social game which has attracted the interest of a UK company that uses open source software to write computer programs. It will appeal to football fans more than comic fans - particularly those who enjoy fantasy football - and will give them the chance to engage with an influence events in the Striker World League. All being well, we could have an early version up and running by the start of the next football season.

***ComicScene:*** *Pete, thanks very much for your time and best of luck for the future with Striker!*

• Striker is on sale and available to order from all good newsagents, or you can subscribe online at www.planetstriker.com

I WANT TO REPORT A YOUNG FOOTBALLER WHO I HAPPEN TO KNOW WILL BE TAKING A BANNED SUBSTANCE FOR A GAME THIS WEEKEND...HIS NAME IS TODD OPENSHAW!!

**Author:** John Freeman
**Twitter:** @johnfreeman_dtt
**Website:** downthetubes.net
**John is currently writing Crucible**

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# ROY OF THE ROVERS

Former editor **Barrie Tomlinson** looks back at **Classic Roy of the Rovers**

**Working with Roy of the Rovers for over twenty years has been a privilege. All the success I had with Roy is a tribute to those who created the character and first put the adventures of Melchester Rovers into print.**

I'm thinking of Roy's first editor, Derek Birnage, the editor who launched Tiger comic, with Roy as the main character. I am thinking of Frank Pepper who wrote the first instalment and Joe Colquhoun who illustrated the opening episodes. Also Bernard Smith, the editor of Lion, who thought up the name 'Roy of the Rovers'. In 1954, those folk created a character so brilliant that he would dominate the headlines for years to come. Well done, the original team!

When I joined Tiger as a sub editor, in the mid 1960's, Roy of the Rovers was firmly in place as the number one story in Tiger. In 1969, Tiger editor David Gregory was asked to produce the football title Shoot. This he did with great success. It meant there was a vacancy for an editor on Tiger. The management had a couple of names in mind for the position but I was lucky when David Gregory recommended me for the job. The management didn't know anything about me but took David's advice and I became Tiger editor.

I wasn't going to let things stay as they were and I soon made Tiger an all-sport title, headed by the mighty Roy of the Rovers. The new look worked and the circulation became very healthy. People started to take notice of Tiger and in 1976 the Editorial Director called me in and said he wanted me to produce an all football comic, in the style of Tiger. I was given a few ideas for a title for the new publication but I surprised everyone by suggesting the new title should be called Roy of the Rovers and Roy would move from Tiger into his own comic.

There was much concern about how Tiger would survive but I came up with a cunning plan. Roy of the Rovers would appear in both titles, with different-but-linked stories appearing in Tiger and the new title. Author Tom Tully would write both stories. The Roy artist, at that time David Sque, would not be able to draw both stories so I asked Yvonne Hutton to draw Roy in Tiger, with David concentrating on the new comic.

My plan worked well and the Tiger circulation did not dip when we launched Roy of the Rovers. After a few months, I decided it was safe to drop Roy from Tiger. This I did and once again the Tiger circulation did not falter. The Billy's Boots story took over as the top story in Tiger.

I was eager to give the Roy of the Rovers comic a spectacular launch so I asked the Duke of Edinburgh to write an article for the first issue. A lot of people have asked me: 'How on earth did you manage that?' Simple: I just wrote to Buckingham Palace with the request and the Duke said 'Yes!'

A couple of years later, the Duke visited our editorial offices. He asked me if I thought Roy of the Rovers was a soap

opera. It was the first time I'd heard anyone refer to the Roy Race story as a soap opera. But you know what? He was right. I had turned it into a soap! I think it was what readers expected. They were growing up watching soap operas on television and expected the same thing in their comics!

The Roy story continued to go from strength to strength. There was no money for an advertising budget so I decided that I would create my own publicity by having things written into the Roy storyline which would get us lots of free publicity.

I got massive publicity on TV, radio and in the newspapers when Roy got married, became a dad, when his wife left him (and came back!), when he was shot, when Sir Alf Ramsey took over the team, when Geoffrey Boycott became Melchester chairman, when Bob Wilson and Emlyn Hughes joined Melchester and when two members of Spandau Ballet joined the team.

I played all those stories for real. When I was interviewed, I wasn't Roy's editor I was his best friend. The media also played it for real and the whole thing worked well. A few folk said I was seeking publicity for myself. No way. I was just someone who wanted to promote the titles I was editing. I think the way Roy of the Rovers is remembered and followed is in no small way attributed to the publicity I created for the character. So much so, that in 2018 the character was relaunched.

Rebellion have a great responsibility now they have editorial control of the character. They mustn't lose Roy's basic characteristics in the modern world of football. I note that they have tremendous enthusiasm for what they are producing. From what I've seen of their new Roy, it looks as if it's going to be a winner! The decision to relaunch Roy is a great tribute to all the writers, artists and editorial folk who have worked on the title.

I was booted off Roy of the Rovers in 1990 and after my time new editorial teams attempted to modernise the story. They brought in all sorts of things I would never have considered but most importantly the whole outlook of the story changed. I do appreciate, however, that the editorial folk put a lot of effort into what appeared after my time but, in my opinion I don't think it worked. I won't even talk about the Roy-losing-his-foot storyline!

I remember, after I stopped being editor, I was invited to a recording studio where Roy was making a record with Gary Lineker. The management thought I could help with the PR. I recall one of the new editorial team coming across to me, smirking and asking: 'What are you doing here? Are you after your old job back?' I resisted punching him on the nose and made do with writing him a truly nasty letter. I think he got the message!

If I was editing Roy of the Rovers today, there would be scope for some wonderful new stories. The massive wages the players earn would give a basis for some dramatic plots.

The multi-national teams would give the opportunity to explore many sub-plots as the Rovers battle to find success in the Champions League.

Generations of children have grown up reading Roy of the Rovers. Many former readers are now dads, grandads and perhaps even great grandads! They will all be encouraging a new generation to read the new Roy and perhaps have a look at Roy from days gone by.

One thing is for sure: the phrase 'Real Roy of the Rovers stuff!' is never going to be forgotten...and it just happens to be the title of my recent book, which is still on sale!

*Copyright © 2019 Rebellion. Roy of the Rovers.*

**Author:** Barrie Tomlinson
**Twitter:** @BarrieEditor1
Barrie's other book is 'Comic Book Hero'. He's currently working on his third book.

# Mike Western

## From Football Fields to Battle Grounds

By Ian Wheeler

**Mike Western is perhaps best remembered for his war comics but he was equally at home drawing sport and adventure. Mike was born in Southampton in 1925 and, after military service, became a clean-up artist for GB Animation. His early comics work included strips for Knock-Out and TV Express and he started contributing to Buster in 1962. From 1976 to 1985, he worked on a strip with which he would become synonymous – The Leopard from Lime Street, which featured schoolboy Billy Farmer who had developed special powers after being scratched by a Leopard! Mike drew the pencils for the story with Eric Bradbury providing the inks.**

After working on Valiant, Mike moved to the title for which he is arguably best known - Battle. Perhaps his most celebrated strip was Darkie's Mob (1976-77), a hard-hitting World War Two story written by John Wagner which told the tale of Captain Joe Darkie who led a rag-tag group of British soldiers behind Japanese lines in Burma. Certain aspects of the story are dated by today's standards (with Wagner feeling that he would tone down some of the jingoist language if he was writing it today) but it remains a bona fide classic. Mike himself would comment: 'Darkies Mob… was my favourite yarn… It had a sort of gritty honesty.' Other Western classics included The Sarge (the story of Sgt Jim Masters who has to shepherd a rookie platoon in World War Two) and HMS Nightshade, the tale of a Royal Navy corvette.

Mike would also demonstrate a flair for sport-related stories. He drew Billy's Boots for Scorcher, Golden Boy for Tiger and Roy of the Rovers for the Daily Star. In the 1980s, he showed a penchant for action and adventure when much of his time was spent working on the new incarnation of Eagle.

Amongst the readers of Eagle was Graeme Neil Reid, now an artist himself: 'My first proper exposure to Mike's art would have been strips like Computer Warrior and The Avenger. Thankfully the release of collections featuring his art has brought a lot the stories I missed first time around to my attention with art that makes any illustrator sit up and pay attention to its construction and pace. Bearing in mind that a lot of these strips were two and half to three pages long each week, aside from the skill of the writer, the art was solid, full of action and pulled no punches. You knew what was happening from panel to panel and you'd never see a dip in quality. Never were there any signs of an artist skipping the hard bits or if a panel was more fun to draw than the next you'd never see a lowering of the standards, each page was solid. His inking defined hardware just as easily as it highlighted nature and the human form in action. With pages often having around nine panels or more he didn't skimp on backgrounds either but also excelled in the classic 'floating' group of heads caught in conversation. It says

*Photographs courtesy of Peter Western.*

ALL IN YOUR OWN CAPTION I'M TOO BUSY TO THINK ONE UP!!
THIS SHOULD SELL IN MY SHOP EASILY! I WONDER IF I'M ELIGIBLE FOR THE TATE YET?
A SUSSEX ARTIST
ANOTHER SUSSEX ARTIST
OLIVIER
JOHN WAYNE
LATE EDITION FROM TULLY
SLIP THIS ONE IN MIKE!
EXTRA COVER FOR SID
URGENT! MIKE!
RING RING
DINNER
LIFE WITH THE WORKAHOLICS!

something of an artist that you can produce work that is easily read and entertains its audience and yet can keep the fans pouring over the line work for hours soaking in every detail.'

Barrie Tomlinson, Editor and Group Editor of titles such as Tiger and Eagle, has his own memories: 'For many years, I looked at Mike's artwork with great envy as he wasn't working for my group. It was a moment of triumph when he began working for one of my titles. His work on Battle stories such as Darkie's Mob, HMS Nightshade and The Sarge was absolutely top class. When artist Yvonne Hutton died as a result of a car crash, Mike stepped in and illustrated Roy of the Rovers for the Daily Star. His football work on Billy's Boots is also a classic to be remembered. Above all, he was a true gentleman. Always a pleasure to talk to and be with. I treasure a Christmas card he sent me, drawn by Mike of he and his wife. He drew a story called Meet the Horrors for Scream. This never appeared in the comic but recently I was able to present the three pages of Mike's artwork to the Cartoon Museum. One of the last things he drew for me was a story for a comic I was producing for DanAir. It never saw the light of day, which was unfortunate, as the artwork was brilliant.'

In the early 2000s, I produced a comics fanzine called Eagle Flies Again (with John Freeman) which focused mainly on the New Eagle but also featured other British comics of the 1980s. Mike was a true friend to the 'zine and we corresponded for several years.

Mike died in 2008 aged 83, having suffered a stroke followed by a heart attack. Steve Holland of the Bear Alley website was amongst those who paid tribute: 'One of the giants of British comics has laid down his pen for the last time,' wrote Steve.

Mike's legacy lives on. Titan have reprinted the likes of Darkie's Mob and HMS Nightshade. The Leopard from Lime Street has been reprinted by Rebellion and the recent The Vigilant comic featured an updated version of the character. And a compilation of Billy's Boots is on its way soon. Mike remains one of Britain's most fondly remembered comics artist and the cannon of work he created will be appreciated for many years to come.

**Mike's son,** Peter Western, kindly took time out to answer a few questions about his father:

***Mike was of a generation who were typically modest about their military service but did his wartime experiences influence his work as an artist?***

Mike didn't see any active service as the war was largely over by the time he was conscripted. But army life very much influenced him, and unlike some men who had a horrendous time, he was happy to talk about his experiences to us kids. He even kept a diary based on notes he made of his postings. After interminable training in England and Wales, he was posted to Antwerp and Brussels in 1945 and the following year to Cairo and Alexandria in Egypt.

The most dangerous aspect of being stationed in Belgium were the doodlebugs that were regularly dropping on the city. In Cairo, terrorists blew up the art room. Luckily no-one was in it at the time. It was the first time Mike had been abroad and I think he soaked in all the sights and details of men in uniforms, the natives, guns, lorries and locations. I've never seen much in the way of artwork from his war years, but, by all accounts, he was always drawing when he could. Later he diligently collected reference material and kept it in scrap books.

In 1947, having been demobbed, he joined GB Animation in Cookham, Berkshire where he met my mother, Enid. Initially he was what is called a 'clean-up' artist, a good draughtsman who made clean and solidly-drawn versions of the animators rough, but lively animation drawings. He was later promoted to being an animator and did much of the studio's publicity artwork, then moved to Stroud, Gloucestershire and worked on Halas and Batchelor's Animal Farm animated feature. Soon after, I was born, in 1952.

On the recommendation of Ron 'Nobby' Clark, Mike started working as a comics artist for Fleetway at about this time. We moved to Horsham where my parents bought their first (and only) modest estate house. Initially Mike worked in the small upstairs box room and had to make way at night for my baby sister, Mandy - such were the deadlines, he would continue inking downstairs on the dining room table in the evenings. He later told me the animation training did not help him to get better 'blacks' into his comics work at first. It took time, confidence and years of hard-won experience for him to establish his style. But he soon came to be regarded as one of Fleetway's best and most dependable artists and established a 'house' style that other artists had to follow to a certain

extent. He could then afford to tack a little studio extension onto the back of the house.

*Did he work very long hours? How did he organise his day? Was he an early bird or a night owl?*

Yes, he worked very long hours all his life to the extent that he rarely came on holiday with the family for the full duration. My Mum put up with the situation and accepted that that was the lot of the freelancer's life. Mike was sometimes afraid that if he allowed another artist to take over, as a freelancer with a growing family to support, he may have lost the strip he was working on at that time....PARANOID??? YES!!

Over the years, he developed a very self-disciplined working day. He would get up at 6am, wash, shave, tweak his moustache and cook his own breakfast. He also woke us with cups of hot home-made lemonade. Then he would go out for at least an hour's walk in the nearby countryside, which he loved, and in all weathers. When he got home, he would like to spend another half hour, priming his pipe, reading the script and probably mentally figuring how to lay out the page. When he did start, he worked very quickly, lightly and roughly pencilling out the panels. He had a loose and organic method to page layout but soon started to rule the panel outlines in. The magic for me, was looking over his shoulder as he started to ink in the figures and backgrounds. He used No.1 or 2 sable brushes and he had an innate knack of creating gorgeous 'thick and thin' lines with the Indian ink. He always used good quality materials but realised he could buy cheaper board than the expensive 'Bristol' fashion board that he first started with.

At 1pm he would break for lunch. (My Mum was a housewife and always made sure a hot dinner was served on time.) Then he would go out again for another hour on his bike, get back and work steadily until about 5.30pm when he would have his tea (bread, jam, cheese, cake etc.). Then my Mum would accompany him for an evening walk until he would return to put in another two hours work until, say, 9pm. He would then stop, join my mother to watch the telly (we only got one when he was working on TV Express and had to watch No Hiding Place to get the actors' likenesses). Then cocoa and bed at 11pm at the latest. The whole routine repeated on a daily basis for the next 40 years! He rarely drank but loved his pipe and went out with a few mates once a month on a Friday for a meal to have a bit of adult male company. My mother was adamant that he took Saturday and Sunday afternoons off to go shopping with her or for family walks. Somehow it worked for my parents as I think they truly loved each other and I

never heard any arguments. I feel my Dad was basically a man, happy with his lot, who made an effort to be jolly with any person he met. He became one of the 'local characters' with his snowy-white crown of hair and white moustache. The local tramps particularly liked him and I think he regarded them as more interesting than your average middle class person with a mortgage and a steady job! He did good paintings of a local coalman and his barrow, named 'Yorkie', and fictional locals in gaiters drinking at corner tables in the pub. He, of course, never had the time to frequent his local!

*I always thought Mike was very good at drawing animals - Shadow the dog in Eagle for example. Did he like animals?*

He wasn't particularly fond of animals but he loved drawing them, horses in particular, which he was really great at. Even my Disney-trained animator friends around the world acknowledge that! My sister was always on at my parents to get a dog. They finally caved in when she was 16 and she chose a beagle which was promptly named 'Bennie'. The next week, she'd lost interest, having met a boyfriend. My Dad started taking Bennie out with him for the morning walk and he became very much one of the family. Everyone was upset when he had to be put down, years later. It was like losing a child!

*In the 2000s, there seemed to be an increased awareness of Mike's work – the Judge Dredd Megazine re-ran Darkie's Mob for example. How did he feel about being re-discovered?*

Dad sent me and my younger brother copies of the Megazine. I think he was pleased by the renewed interest as he had long since retired. People like Phil Jupitus were saying things like 'Mike Western's house style looks dated compared to the new breed of 2000AD artists' on the radio. The letters columns in Megazine either loved the strip and were full of nostalgia for younger days, reading the strip in the school playground...or were disturbed by the 'racist' language from John Wagner's scripts, which were of their time. Talking of which, Wagner made a personal visit to my Dad and told him he expected him to 'up the ante on the drawing' - I think John was very pleased too with the standard of the work on this strip. It probably is his best comics work - remarkable as it was done quite late in his career.

I know younger artists like David Roach and Rufus Dayglo LOVE my Dad's work and are real fans. I was pleased to give them original pages from The Sarge, the only work returned to Mike. Rumour has it Darkie's Mob was stolen from IPC's warehouse because they went looking for it and there was none of his work in storage. The older stuff had been pulped, of course, long before the collectors got interested. David Roach is currently putting together a book of British Comics artists and a page of The Sarge will be printed in high resolution for the first time ever!

*Did Mike's work influence your own decision to become an artist?*

I knew from a very early age that I wanted to follow in my Dad's footsteps as an artist. I loved all his work and my own 'style' was very influenced by his. Dad never lectured me too much when it came to drawing, but he didn't like seeing me try to copy another artist's style - he said I should always draw naturally, preferably studying people etc in real situations. It took me a LONG time to follow that advice but I do so now that I'm retired myself, going out and about drawing on the tube or on the street etc.

He also dissuaded me from going into the comics business as he said it was such hard work and poorly-paid... so I ended up in animation, then storyboarding which is also hard work and in the main for children's TV, poorly paid too!! But the powers that be awarded me a Children's BAFTA Special Award in 2016... which was nice!!

My Dad also made sure I got a good art education and I changed schools when I was 16 to get better art teaching.

*What was your own favourite story from the comics that Mike drew?*

The first one I really loved was The Shrinker in Buster - it had a classic 'noir' feel like EC Comics (I'm thinking of Jack Davis and Wally Wood here). Very influential in my early career. From the start I also loved The Wild Wonders Tom Tully-scripted story for Valiant. I liked the way the characters gradually transformed from a 'straight' to a much broader cartoon style, but it was consistently brilliantly drawn for over a decade. When I left home to go to art school in London in the early 70s, I rather lost touch with what he was drawing. People now tell me The Leopard of Lime Street is their own favourite - a different generation, you see!

*Did he have a favourite himself that you're aware of?*

I don't remember him having a favourite. I think he tried to do his best, at all times, with the huge variety of subjects he was given to tackle. He wasn't a fan of football but he studied games on TV to get the action right on strips like Billy's Boots and Roy of the Rovers for The Star newspaper. I suspect he was really proud of Darkie's Mob but I think he just loved drawing per se. In later life, he loved painting pictures to exhibit in local art shows - very successfully too. I have a couple of his late pieces and I love them!

*What projects are you working on at the moment and what have you got coming up in the near future?*

As I said, I'm retired now but I draw and paint most days. I have a few commissions waiting. Recently I painted the studio where we made Who Framed Roger Rabbit? in Camden for a Canadian author who is writing a book about the film. It might become the cover for the book. Whatever, I got paid for it! I'm gearing up for a group exhibition in Bruges next August which I'm very much looking forward to. I'll probably get a little book of my best, most recent work together to sell there. I like putting my work up on Facebook and Instagram as a way of getting it out there and it's getting nice responses.

*With thanks to Peter Western.*

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# BILLY'S BOOTS

## in Dutch

Billy Dane was the star of one of the long-running (and I mean longest-running, it ran from the '70s to the '90s) football comic strips, Billy's Boots. The central premise of the strip is that young Billy has acquired a pair of football boots that once belonged to ace footballer Charles 'Dead Shot' Keen and that when Billy wears these boots he somehow becomes magically imbued with all the skill and flair that Dead Shot himself possessed – of course, without the boots he resorts to hacking the ball around the park like the rest of us. So, the challenge each week for scriptwriter Fred Baker was to come up with new and innovative ways for Billy to lose these boots so that disaster ensues and the school cup tie (or whatever) is lost – or, as the boots were typically found in the nick of time, the cup tie isn't lost and the team march serenely on to the following week's opportunity to lose the amazing boots.

So, to be clear, this is a football strip which is weirdly dedicated to the pursuit of either not actually playing football (or footer as Billy always called it and I'll call it from here on in) or playing footer really badly. Given this premise it's amazing it survived twenty weeks in a football comic, let alone twenty years! You also have to marvel at the ingenuity of Fred Baker to think up (barely) believable ways for Billy and Dead Shot Keen's boots to be parted (and subsequently re-united) quite as often as they were.

While Billy never aged in the strip (he would forever look about 10 and a half), the seasons would change and, come the Summer holidays – which I was always impressed to see coincided with my actual six weeks Summer holiday – the opportunities for footer would naturally be more limited (apart from some impromptu games of beach footer or a game against some of the local lads in whichever town Billy and his gran had gone for their summer holiday). To get around this problem Billy, like many an old-time football pro, would turn his hand to cricket in the summer months and the use of Dead Shot Keen's old cricket boots (!) helped him no end on the cricket pitch.

Looking back, the strip had a complex publishing history which makes collecting it all tricky, as you need a mix of complete and partial runs of different titles. Billy's Boots first appeared in issue one of Scorcher (10/01/70) and ran continuously, surviving the merger with Score [becoming Scorcher and Score (03/07/71)], before merging with Tiger to create Tiger and Scorcher (12/10/74). Tiger in turn eventually merged with new Eagle to create Eagle and Tiger (06/05/85) where the strip ran for a year (to 10/05/86) when, before such a thing had even been invented really, the Summer transfer window opened and off it went to Roy of the Rovers (17/05/86-12/05/90) and then, finally, to Roy of the Rovers monthly (which itself ceased publication in September 1992). Phew.

So, the news that Rebellion's Treasury of British Comics imprint were to start reprinting Billy's Boots stories will have football comics fans of a certain age licking their lips in excitement – this after all is the first time that Billy's adventures will have been published in over 25 years, right? Weirdly, no. In fact, like many British comics, Billy's exploits have been extensively published overseas – in Finland the strip is known as Benny Guldfot, in Sweden as Benny Kultajalka and in Iceland as Kalli í knattspyrnu. Often such overseas reprints mean the British strip is included in a comic along with a selection of other comic strips. However, in the Netherlands Billy, or Sjakie as he's known there, has

"...in the Netherlands he's the star of no less than 33 dedicated reprint volumes!"

(somehow) found a very popular home where the strip as a whole is known as De Wonderloffen van Sjakie (The magic boots of Sjakie). In fact in the Netherlands he's the star of no less than 33 dedicated reprint volumes!

The first 24 volumes contain over 1100 pages of art by (the main series artist) John Gillatt and the final 9 volumes add up to over 400 pages of Mike Western art. In both cases this represents the best way to access years of strips by these two superlative artists. Assuming three pages of art a week on the strip means 150+ pages a year – so these 33 volumes still only cover about a decade's worth of Billy's Boots, so probably only half of the entire run of the story. Leaving that aside, the (fully coloured) volumes, published between 1980 and 2001, represent an incredible record of Billy's adventures that I'd be delighted if the Treasury of British comics reprints could even come close to living up to.

What I'd really love the new reprint volumes to show to British readers is the great covers that the Dutch volumes had as these were all unique additions by the main artist responsible, John Gillatt, and have never been in print in the UK before. It's therefore a pleasure to now be able to share a selection of these covers with ComicScene readers.

John Gillat was an incredibly prolific artist whose career began in the late 1950s and continued until 2003. In that time he illustrated many comic strips but will perhaps be best remembered for illustrating Billy's Boots, Johnny Cougar, Jet-Ace Logan and the newspaper strip Scorer among many other strips. Sadly he died aged 87 on 4th November 2016.

These 33 covers therefore represent a previously unseen glimpse of Billy's adventures (and an opportunity to recall just how short football shorts used to be) and are surely the ultimate collectible for any Billy's Boots fan. While my conversational Dutch isn't up to much I do at least have an idea about what is going on in some of the volumes "De Comeback", "In de finale!", "De Supercup" and "Golden goal" proving that football is indeed a universal language.

*Images copyright Rebellion and Big Balloon Publishing*

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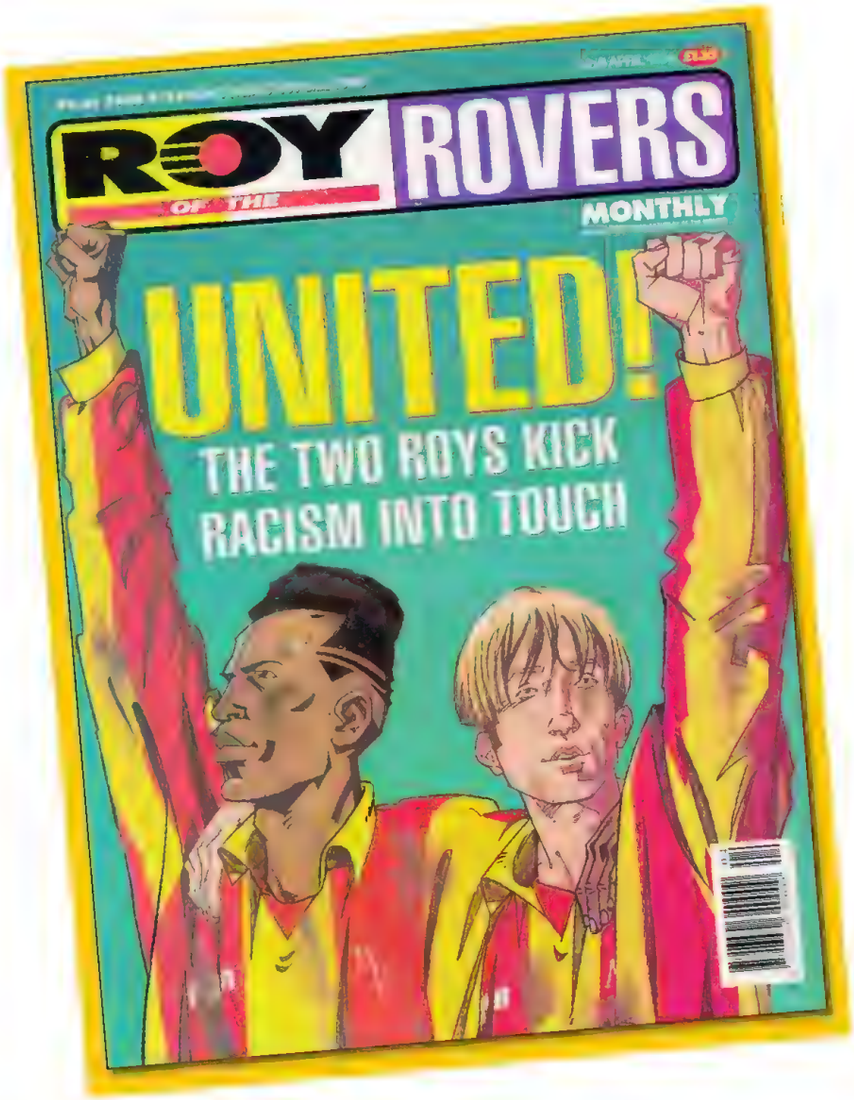
# ROY OF THE

**Roy of the Rovers** may well be one of the most recognisable characters in British Comics. But, back in 1993, things looked very grim and the future for Roy was far from certain. Sales were down and the cancellation of the comic in March 1993 marked the first time in nearly 40 years without Roy on the racks.




Six months later, September '93, an all new Roy of the Rovers monthly debuted. For 19 issues, a radical reinvention of all things Roy and Melchester took place, thanks to editor/writer Stuart Green and a group of incredibly talented young artists. Yet, this part of the history of Melchester's favourite son is rarely mentioned. It's far past time to change that. So, with that in mind, I sat down with Green, Rob Davis and Sean Longcroft to talk reinvention and a radical new kind of football comic.

It all came about from the ashes of a proposed football comic Green pitched to the ideas factory and money pit that was Tundra UK. As Green says, "I remember walking down the street and the idea hit me like a thunderbolt - do a football comic". That became a proposal for Glory Glory, put together by Green, Frank Plowright and some incredible UK comic talent. Suffice it to say, it was going to be radical and far from the staid and dull predictability of ROTR.

Sadly, Glory Glory never made it past a dummy issue 1, but, ironically, when pitching the comic around other publishers, Green found himself at Roy's publishers, Fleetway. "They seemed fairly enthusiastic and called to say we don't want to do Glory Glory but we wondered if you could use your ideas on ROTR for a monthly mag with a budget for just 8 pages of original strip."

Roy of the Rovers Monthly was born. An immediate revelation, a very modern take on the old, staid format. The immediate shock was that Roy Race's playing days were over, his famous left foot amputated following a helicopter crash. In his place, the mantle of footballing glory fell to his son, Rocky. This was the modern young player writ large, prodigious talent, too much money, and an ego that outstripped both. He was, in short, a spoilt brat.

Rocky wasn't even the best striker at Melchester. That accolade fell to a superstar Nigerian player... 'Delroy' of the Rovers, the perfect addition in the

# ROVERS MONTHLY

BITE YOUR NAILS WITH BRITAIN'S GREATEST FOOTBALL COMIC
ROY OF THE ROVERS
MONTHLY
Screamer!
ONE GAME LEFT,
THREE POINTS NEEDED
Subbuteo
OOOH! Win a week of summer fun on an FA Coca Cola coaching scheme
AAAH! As featured in

days of the growing Kick It Out movement. Green again, "The racism thing came about because we were approached by Kick it Out, but I had it in from the start. I figured we'd have a black and a white Roy playing. I called him Delroy, which I really hated, it was only about five years later I realised I should have called him Leroy, so much better!"

One truly radical move was the decision to alter ROTR history to get around the issue of Roy having played 40 years in top-flight football. As Green explains, "The character is as old as Batman, he's been going forever, and the problem was, coming from a comic book fan such as myself, there was no continuity. So we introduced the idea that Rocky was the third Roy Race". Suddenly, this was a generational saga, with granddad Roy playing in the 50s and 60s and the Roy that fans grew up with playing in the 70s and 80s.

This footballing dynasty was introduced in the magnificent series highpoint, issue 6. As Green says, "The first season was an extended coming of age story, Rocky gets in the team, gets a good start, then it all goes a bit sour, he can't handle the pressure. Then it comes to our favourite episode, where he's doing a George Best, he's gone missing and turns up wandering around his local park, chatting to this old man on the side of the pitch, reminiscing about Melchester Rovers' achievements and just what Melchester and Roy Race meant to him and the city. I wanted Melchester to be what real football clubs are, rooted in the history and culture of their towns. I loved that issue and Rob's work on it was just amazing".

Yes, if the stories were a radical departure, the art took that and trumped it. In Rob Davis, Sean Longcroft, Gerraint Ford, Garry Marshall and David Jukes, Stuart Moore had found a new generation of artists to take ROTR into the 90s. But, it was a big step up, as Davis notes, "Sean and I were working on an experimental, psychedelic comic,

SLANG. It's hard to imagine a greater leap from what we were doing to what they wanted. We were both football fans but our comics work was more about kitchen sink psychedelia than sporty high achievers".

Davis continues, "With ROTR, my experimental comic art ideas and Stuart's iconoclastic approach to British comics' cherished blond football star welded perfectly. What I lacked in basic skills (a fair bit!) I made up for with ambition and invention. We probably overreached ourselves and missed the mark a few times, but there are moments in those comics that really soared. We loved football, we loved comics and we took art very seriously. I used multiple flashback techniques; a classic 70s moment would look like a 70s football annual, a Brazilian player's childhood would feel wax crayoned and magic realist, Rocky's memories of his dad seem golden, Roy's memories of his dad playing would be muscular, pastel and blurred and I contrasted that with grim, rainy working class towns and people for whom the local team was their only joy".

As for Longcroft, the experience quickly changed his views on classic ROTR artists, "Drawing football athletes in action, and interaction, in perspective, in sequential narrative, is one of the toughest disciplines. I used to sneer at Barrie Mitchell and Mike White for lacking the imagination of Belardinelli, or the invention of Mike McMahon, but I realised how much proper drawing they put in when I tried to draw the lead strip, which I made the most amateurish ham-fisted hash of. Rob pulled it off brilliantly. But me? Well, I learnt a lot!"

Both Longcroft and Davis are (overly) critical of their artwork on ROTR, but I loved it, and so did Green, who is effusive in his praise of all involved, but particularly Davis' work, "He really got into my scripts, he would deliver things that weren't in there, it was just amazing what he did. He was determined to draw the football action from angles that had never been used before, and he did. His characterisations were incredible. I can't praise him highly enough".

Longcroft sums the whole experience up beautifully, "When Stuart spotted us and put us in this exciting sounding new comic, on very generous wages, I had a personal hero Garry Leach purring at my artwork as he watched me draw it, and people mistaking my artwork for Mick McMahon's, I think we took it in our stride that we were suddenly largely given responsibility for the look of a household-name title. St Etienne's 'Nothing's Gonna Stop Us Now' got a lot of plays around then".

Sadly, this new ROTR proved too much the radical reinvention. Perhaps it was the timing, perhaps it would have a better fit now, but whatever it was, 19 issues was all we had, with the comic bowing out in September 1995. Davis explains some of the issues going on, "We felt we were breathing new life into Roy's world, but some people who liked the never-never land felt we were squatting". Fleetway, certainly, took a hands-off approach, as Green explains, "As far as Fleetway were concerned, they'd published it for 40 or 50 years and cancelled it through lack of sales. They weren't putting much money into this new magazine and they were looking to see if I could make it fly. We initially doubled the sales from what it was, maybe 5k to 10k, something like that, and they were really pleased".

There is a sense that it was a football comic that appealed more to comic fans than football fans. As Green says, "Comic fans

who read it came up to me at conventions and said I'd never read a football comic ever and I love what you're doing". Davis agrees, "Latterly I've had a lot of positive response from people who read it. I discovered that many of my generation of artists and comic fans had been reading and loving the comic even if many of them had no interest in football at all."

As for its lasting legacy... Davis sums it all up so well, "We didn't try to make the most popular thing we could, or produce a retro item for nostalgia geeks, we tried to make something truthful. It's flawed, my art is seriously flawed in places, but it was a genuine expression of the culture with a love of football and a love for the people who love football".

After ROTR, both Davis and Longcroft went onto other projects, with Davis leaving comics before, eventually, returning with Don Quixote, and his Motherless Oven trilogy (the third part of which comes out in 2019). Looking back, he says this, "I had always made comics, but ROTR gave me the chance to pursue it as a career. Sadly, I soon realised that a career in comics meant reheating the same old characters I read as a child. It was the opposite of what I wanted to do, so I quit comics as a profession until the opportunity to originate new stories and get them published presented itself".

As for Green, he moved onto pastures new, "I was just dead lucky, music's always been my first love and when I was looking around for stuff, a couple of mates told me they had a band looking for a manager. That band was Alabama 3, who went on to do the soundtrack for the Sopranos. I went on to work for Bjork, and I've done music management ever since. That's been amazing; I've worked with some incredible artists and travelled round the world".

But, despite being out of comics, Green just can't stop thinking about football comics. "When Rebellion announced they had bought all of the Fleetway characters, I got in touch and said I'd love to write Roy again. If I were to do one again, I'd have a strip set in the 60s, players fighting for the maximum wage, the World Cup, the swinging 60s and all that. And probably have a strip about Roy's sister playing football today. But, I don't think they were even aware of ROTR Monthly. I think they quickly decided they wanted to go another way, I don't blame them."

"I do want to want to write a graphic novel about the history of Man Utd from 1958, the Munich air crash, to winning the European Cup in 1968, but I've been too lazy to do the research and I've probably had that idea for 20 years. I think if I got that right, it could be really huge, it's a great story, how the dream dies at Munich and was resurrected after ten years, great symmetry about that. I should maybe get Rob to do it, 100 pages of Man United for a Liverpool fan, that's going to be difficult. Only two pages a week for a year, Rob, c'mon!"

Finally, I mention the prospect of reprints for ROTR Monthly, now that Rebellion have the rights to all things Roy. Green's definitely on board, "Obviously, I would love that to happen. It's not something I hold out for, but it would be fantastic to have the work recognised. It's really flattering that comic fans appreciated what we did."

Frankly, the ROTR monthly was ahead of its time back in the 90s. Maybe, just maybe, this little piece of Roy Race history would find the readership and acclaim it deserves now?

***Next Month:*** *Glory Glory.*

**Author:** Richard Bruton
**Twitter:** @richardbruton
Garry Marshall work can be found in ComicScene Annual

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phil-comics presents...

# Comic Free Gifts

## "Today's giveaways tend to be generic toys and sweets, whereas the comics of yesteryear very often had gifts that were designed specifically for each comic."

For as long as memory serves, as comic collectors, we have always had a penchant for the free gifts. Being collectors of Beano and Dandy, that has meant searching for the Dandy Thunderbang, the Beano Clicketty Clicker, Dan's Nutty Nougat bar and the Beano Whoopee Mask (25 years on and we are still looking, although we did have the rare pleasure of viewing and handling the only

that's known to exist, a few years back) amongst many others. Just four free gifts from two comic titles and they represent four completely different items, such is the wonderful world of free gifts. Indeed, collecting free gifts can almost be considered a hobby in its own right. We know of collectors who only collect free gifts and others who focus solely on first issues with their giveaways.

Comic free gifts have come in just about every conceivable form over the decades. By no means an exhaustive list but there have been cardboard bangers, card planes, plastic planes, stickers, transfers, records, booklets, wrist watches, posters, badges, whistles, sweets, balloons, 3D specs, masks, drink powders, football cards, brooches, earrings and a multitude of toys and games. It's not surprising really given the vast array of comic titles published in the 20th Century, covering many genres and appealing to a wide range of children. When one thinks that the first three issues of any comic title gave away a gift, almost without fail, plus an array of gifts given away down the years to boost sales, the humble collector of free gifts can spend a lifetime seeking their precious hoard of scarcities.

We were in WHSmiths in December doing our Christmas shopping and were amazed at the line-up of comics on offer to children these days. The Beano comic aside, the vast majority were in plastic packaging, presumably to house one or more free gifts. This was

ultimately the legacy of the declining comic market and the continued rise of supermarkets in the 1990s. Supermarkets were, of course, big sellers and felt that add-ons like gifts would increase sales, so pushed publishers to include them. The knock-on effect was that the readership then came to expect free gifts as the norm.

Today's giveaways tend to be generic toys and sweets, whereas the comics of yesteryear very often had gifts that were designed specifically for each comic. As you'll read shortly in this feature, it was a big deal giving away a free gift back then. Publishers DC Thomson, IPC and others were all competing for the relevant readership their comics targeted and so the more enticing the gift, the better.

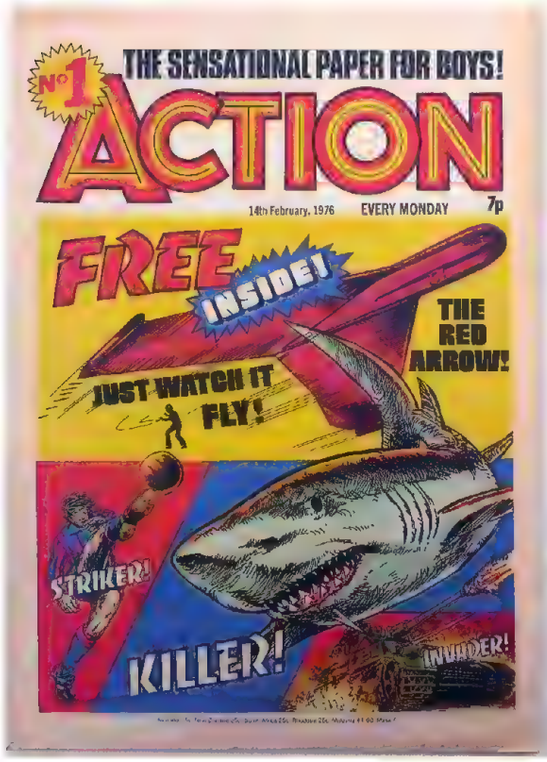
Back in the British comic heyday, large print runs meant large budgets. Amazingly, from the 1960s to the 1980s, there was invariably a TV advert associated with not only the launch of new comics, but they were also employed to promote the giving away of most / all of the later free gifts. You can find the original TV adverts on YouTube for the first issue of 2000AD (1977) and Eagle (1982), both of which included a free Space Spinner, albeit in different colours. A quick glance down the YouTube comments shows a recurring theme; "I saw the advert on TV and went straight down to the newsagents to buy one!", so the adverts were a vital promotional tool.

The Space Spinner was a classic free gift and today is not overly difficult to find. That said, since 2000AD is a relatively recent comic that has stood the test of time and is still published today, it has a large, loyal, following resulting in a seemingly never-ending demand for the early issues. As with most items, prices can fluctuate depending on how many

people are bidding at any one time, but in the last 18 months we've sold four examples of the (red) Space Spinner issued with Prog 1. One on its own sold for a highly impressive £410, whilst three with their comics, in VG to FN grade, realised £155, £162 and £245. This can be contrasted with IPC's relaunched Eagle, of 1982, and with its (silver) Space Spinner prices are considerably less – between £5 and £15 - so nowhere near the dizzying heights of Tharg, Dredd and co.

Unsurprisingly, flying free gifts were a popular giveaway in boys' comics and one such example was the Red Arrow plane. An almost identical plane was given away with Valiant in 1968 and with the launches of Action (1976) and of Speed (1980).

We can use the Valiant version of 1968 to give an insight into the effort that went into giving away comics 'mid-run', so not when a comic was launched. A flyer appeared in other comics the same week, potentially a TV advert produced, the comic's cover featured the gift, a half page instruction inside and the gift itself even came in a printed paper bag. Indeed, the only item they didn't supply was the elastic band! Despite health and safety being largely unheard of in the 1960s, it was interesting to read in the instruction that users should "have a clear area before you, so that your



speeding Red Arrow will not hit anyone!" The 1968 Valiant comic and gift seen here sold in our Dec 2018 auction for £80.

As previously mentioned, the Red Arrow plane was also given away with IPCs first issue of their iconic title Action (1976), complete with a printed paper bag. In 1980, the same plane was gifted with the first issue of Speed, also from IPC, but we believe this was issued without a bag. The presence of the free gift with Action 1 can quadruple the value of the comic. In the last few years we've sold several examples of Action 1, both with and without the Red Arrow. The comic alone tends to average around £25, whilst the sale price usually tops £100 with the gift.

We've come thus far talking about gifts that fly, so will feature another which also has wings and further illustrates the use and re-use of a tried and tested giveaway. This time a cardboard item, shaped like a plane that was designed to be pushed out from a cardboard backing sheet, noise generating wing flaps folded, a piece of string attached and spun round to make a din. Some of these were designed to have a coin taped to the tip to add weight and thus increase speed and, of course in turn, the racket!

There have been several based on this principle with creative names such as Buster's Zoomer-Jet (1960), the New Hotspur Wing-Ding Glider (1964), Sparky's Red Racketty (1965), the Hornet's Hi-Speed Hummer (1967), Beezer Buzzer (1969) and, also from Sparky, the amusingly named Wot-A-Racket (1972). Interestingly, DC Thomson gave away another Red Racketty with The Dandy in #1530 (1971). The principle of all these gifts seemed to be very similar but what was fantastic was that each was specifically designed for the comic in question. Comic publishers and creativity really do go hand in hand.

The above gifts are really hard to find and we've never handled or sold them, so have no sales results to quote. However, we would expect these comic and gift pairings to sell for between £50 and £150, depending on the title and vintage. In 1977, IPC launched Cheeky and included the Red Jet Rattler with the first issue, based on the same concept. We've sold ten or so copies of Cheeky 1, with its gift, over the years and prices seem to average £30, whilst the comic alone tends to sell for £5-10.

A final nod must be given to a free gift that didn't have wings and didn't necessarily fly, but with a name like the 'Humming Birdie' it just had to be mentioned here. Given away with The

Beano in 1971, it was designed to be spun round on string much like a lasso (prior to launching), which caused the three elastic bands to hum. Speaking from personal experience of humming the birdie in our own collection, it's a pretty impressive sound! They are hard to find and we've only sold one before, without the comic, back in late 2015 for £65.

We hope you've enjoyed this article on free gifts but, as you can probably imagine, we've barely scratched the surface of gifts to talk about. As they are such a passion of ours, we hope to continue this as a series of articles on giveaways in future issues of ComicScene.

Please note: due to the rare and elusive nature of free gifts, those featured here are representative examples that we are aware of. Other similar gifts may have been produced that we've yet to come across, further illustrating the enticing nature of collecting vintage comics and related items!

*Images for Beano, Dandy, Sparky and Hornet above are © D.C. Thomson & Co., Ltd. Images for Action, Buster, Cheeky, Smash, Valiant and 2000AD are © Rebellion Publishing IP Ltd.*

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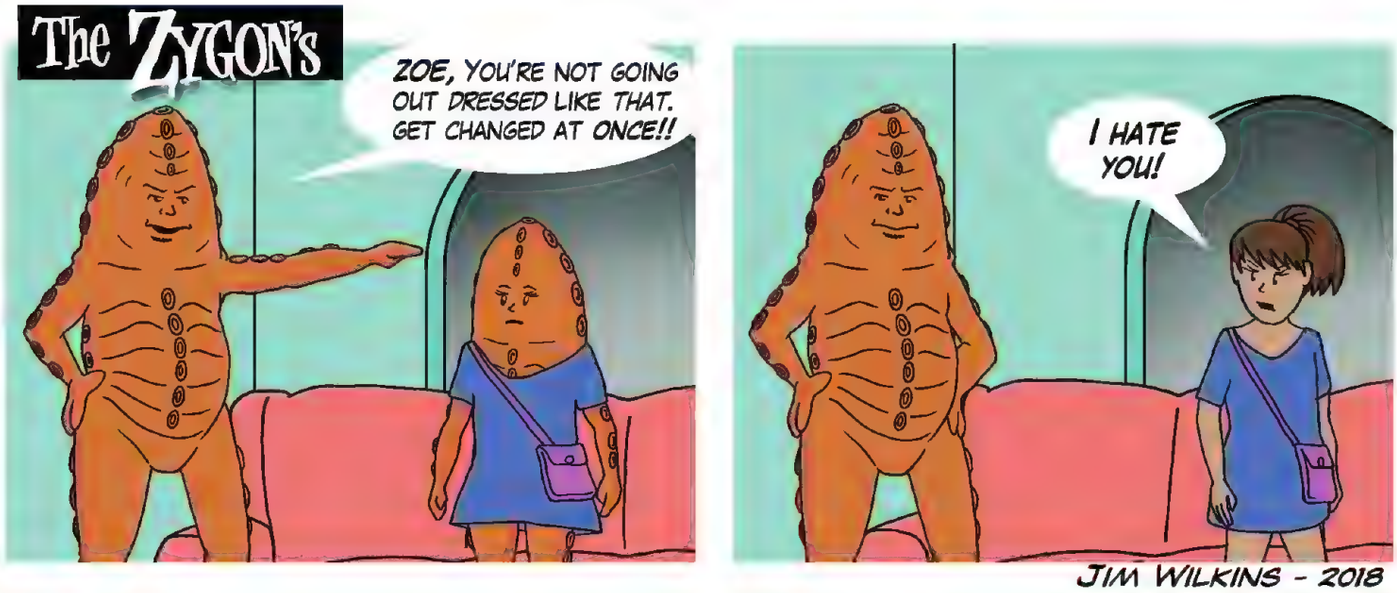

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# BATMAN IN THE 1930'S

In the latter half of the 1930's, National Allied Publications, (later to become known as DC Comics,) released Superman on an unsuspecting world. The sole survivor of the planet krypton was a runaway success, so naturally enough the publishers wanted more superheroes, so they **turned to aspiring writers and artists for new ideas**.

Enter twenty four year old Bob Kane, who had come up with the idea of the Bat-Man after being influenced by the design drawings of Leonardo Di Vinci's flying machine, as well as current pulp characters of the day such as Doc Savage and the Shadow, along with Douglas Fairbanks' Zorro and Roland West's the Bat Whispers.

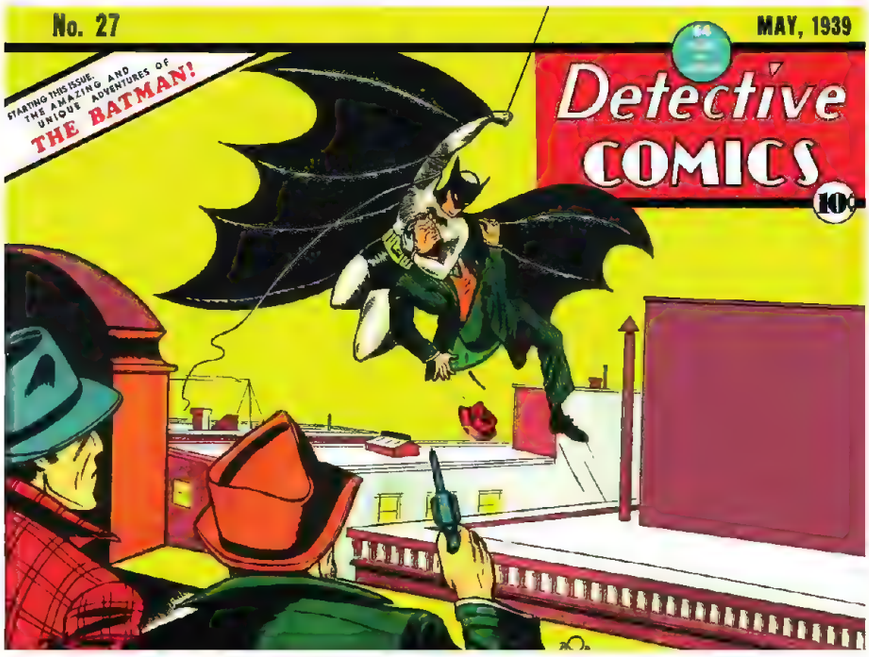
Liking the idea of a human bat, and the fact that this new character seemed the complete opposite to the Man of Steel, the publishers told Kane to get to it. So he set to work but after his initial design of this new anti-hero turned out to be less than inspiring, Bob Kane turned to ghost writer extraordinaire Bill Finger to help flesh out his original idea.

Upon seeing Kane's initial concept and finding it lacking in the mystery department, Mr Finger took the bull by the horns and made suggestions of his own, changes that have altered very little, design-wise, to this very day.

Kane's original idea for the costume was a startling red body suit with a domino mask for the eyes, pretty much like the one a certain Boy Wonder would come to wear a year later. The only thing remotely bat-like about the garish get-up was the rigid black scalloped wings on the back, which actually looked like they would be more of a hindrance than anything else. This "Bat-Man" wasn't even wearing gloves!

With Finger's suggestions that the character needed to be more, well…bat-like, the cowl and ears were added along with the gloves and a flowing scalloped cape, and in May of 1939, Batman burst forth onto the comic scene in issue twenty seven of Detective Comics with such resounding success that both he and Superman together ushered in what is now referred to as the Golden Age of Comics.

However, this was quite a different Batman to the one we know today. For starters he



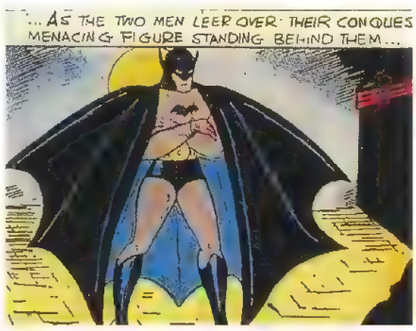

was a far more ruthless crime fighter, believing that you fought fire with fire, not even thinking twice when taking the life of a dastardly villain with his gun. He had no qualms when it came to dealing harshly with lawbreakers. If the punishment fit the crime, then so be it.

Early Batman stories seemed to be more of an amalgamation of the comics that were available at the time, such as Dick Tracy or Doc Savage, and you couldn't have been blamed if you thought you were reading a story about the Shadow, since there was more than a striking similarity between the two vigilantes.

The villains that the wet-behind-the-bat-ears hero faced were in the vein of the moustache twirling mad scientist type, as well as the hardened but glass-jawed gangsters who Batman practically ate for breakfast. The odd supernatural beastie would raise its ugly head occasionally to give the storyline a real supernatural, almost horror story feel to the proceedings, thus catering for all tastes, at least that was what they hoped.

His first foray in issue twenty seven, "The case of the Criminal Syndicate," was a very hardboiled introduction to Batman, giving us a man who meted out justice on his terms, yet there was very little in the way of motivation as to what drove millionaire Bruce Wayne to don the mantle of the Bat and beat criminals to death on a nightly ritual. And it wasn't until issue thirty three in November of 1939 that we learned of Bruce's tragic childhood and the events that forged him to dedicate his life and fortune to fighting crime.

As the early issues progressed, so we were introduced to the vast array of bat themed gadgets and vehicles that the Batman would employ in his one man war on crime. Even the costume is altered slightly, improved upon as we're taken along for the ride. Bill Finger was really getting into his stride with Gotham's guardian.




Though Batman was Bob Kane's idea, it was Mr Finger who put all the meat on the bones of the character, giving us the dual identity of Bruce Wayne. Police Commissioner Gordon was created to give a tool for exposition in the stories, as well as allowing Batman to keep tabs on the bad guys. As time would progress, Finger's prodigious creative outpouring would give us all the tropes we know and love about the Caped Crusader today.

There was the Batcave, Alfred the butler, the Joker, all of Batman's gadgets and equipment, along with most of his nefarious Rogues gallery. Even Gotham City, perhaps the next most important character in the Batman mythos next to the Dark Knight himself sprang from Finger's feverish mind. The list goes on and on…

Bob Kane sold his rights to Batman to DC on the proviso that he alone be named as the creator of the Batman and the strange world he lived in. So in every comic book, cinematic adventure serial, four colour pop art TV show and blockbuster movie to follow, Bob Kane's name was lauded as sole creator, leaving Bill Finger forgotten.

Kane went on to become a wealthy man, all the time refuting that anyone else had any creative input in the Batman. Kane would later regret denying Bill Finger's input, even stating that he should have been recognised as co-creator. But by then it was too late.

Bill Finger died in 1974, penniless and alone.

Mr Finger was a quiet, reserved man, whom people knew very little about, and indeed it was a rarity that the co-creator of perhaps the greatest mystery character in comic book history turns out to be an even greater enigma himself.

Today he is recognised for his input into the Dark Knight Detective (he even created that moniker too…) though for me personally it's too little too late.

Thanks mainly to Finger's prolific imagination Batman became an instant hit, and so pleased were the publishers with Batman's adventures, and only too eager to make hay while the sun shined, it wasn't long before Batman would go on to get a title all his own. In the meantime, however, they wanted Batman to be toned down slightly and become more kid friendly in the hopes of selling even more comics.

Once again they turned to Bill Finger, who would in answer to this, go on to create Robin the Boy Wonder in issue thirty eight of Detective Comics in 1940.

But that's a whole new decade, and a chapter for another day.

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# MARVEL UK

## The first ten (or so) years of Marvel UK

## Part One: Bigger than a Breadbox!

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**Twitter:** @gouldp7070
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For many they're as British as they come and more than mere reprints. As a generation of UK comic readers [illegible] to the weekly all-action exploits of Judge Dredd [illegible]dger and Lord Peter Flint, so too Bruce Banner, Peter Parker and Matt Murdock. The two sets of characters were never mutually exclusive: before signing up as a Warlord Secret Agent or joining the Fireball Club, many were already fully fledged members of F.O.O.M! In The Kids from Rec. Road strip from ComicScene Vol.1 #1, Pete Dorre, Sean Philips and David Holman begin a wonderfully nostalgic trip down memory lane by each holding up examples of the Marvel UK (or British Marvel as it was known) line, each proclaiming theirs as 'the greatest comic ever!' Whilst retaining love and loyalty for homegrown action/adventure titles such as Battle, Warlord, Bullet, Action or 2000AD, many found, and clearly still do, room in their hearts for Marvel's UK reprints which only proves that the very idea of (re)introducing these characters to the UK in the first place actually worked.

UK reprints of Marvel (or Timely or Atlas as the company was known) had been appearing as far back as the 1950's in occasional cheap black and white reprints from the likes of Thorpe & Porter and Alan Class, yet as the Marvel Universe began to evolve following 1961's Fantastic Four #1 unreliable imports meant that this expanding universe remained incoherent for many in the UK. Stumbling across random storylines remained an issue until the licensed Odhams reprints of the mid-to-late Sixties [illegible] readers first real introduction [illegible] Titles such as Smash! [illegible] featured Marvel char[illegible]en [illegible]gside wonderful home gro[illegible]ps such as Grimly Fiendish, with (on one occasion in 1966) Smash! even featuring its own original 'homegrown' Hulk story. Cherished by a generation of fans, the 'Power' line of comics expanded through titles such as Fantastic! and Terrific!, predominantly Marvel in content with popular colour pin-up pages and attempts to generate the inclusive, friendly editorial identity similar to that forged so successfully by Stan Lee in the US. Yet by early 1969 it was all over, with Odhams, already a subsidiary of the parent [illegible] Magazines Limited. Smash! would survive a little while longer, but the link with the licensed Marvel characters was severed.

Lee had always been unhappy with the way their characters had been presented alongside humour strips in the UK and remained intent on an eventual 'pure Marvel' excursion into the market. Staffers such as Sol Brodsky and a young Jim Salicrup were thus tasked with overseeing the editorial content of a proposed new UK weekly title, with copy produced in a small corner of the US bullpen before being sent to a UK office overseeing production.

The resultant premiere issue of The Mighty World Of Marvel (or MWOM as it would quickly become known in the letters page) hit newsagents the week-ending October 7th 1972. Its bold claim of showcasing 'the Worlds Greatest Superheroes' backed by the Incredible Hulk, Amazing Spiderman and Fantastic Four all bounding out of the blocks towards the reader in a colourful and original John Buscema cover. Turning the page the reader was launched straight into the new world with green/white duotone pages reprinting the first portion of the very first Incredible Hulk strip from 1962. The new title attempted a balancing act, adhering to the anthology format of UK contemporaries whilst retaining the impact of the source material. Thus the reader found three strips over 40 pages, the majority being green/white duotone with a smattering of black and white or full colour, the later utilised mainly for pin-up pages or the special announcements reserved for the centre spread. The format allowed for one full length Marvel US issue to be split, usually over two weeks (giving the effect of a mild mid-story cliffhanger) and with the first portions of Fantastic Four #1 and Amazing Fantasy #15 following on from the Hulk strip, the intent is clearly to showcase the Marvel Universe right from the very beginning.

The first few issues came with the obligatory UK-industry free gift (transfers and stickers) with the 5p cover price at the top end of the scale for 1972. Significantly the title broke with one particular UK industry standard; every week the original creator credits were presented just as in the US. If amounting to little more that a 'Stan Lee and Jack Kirby / Steve Ditko' signature on these very early works, the boxed-off 'roll call' that Stan Lee always had so much fun with was imminent, with UK readers able to associate familiar

DON'T MISS THE AMAZING NEWS INSIDE!
THE MIGHTY WORLD OF
MARVEL
5p
INTRODUCING:
DAREDEVIL
THE MAN WITHOUT FEAR!
A FABULOUS NEW FEATURE--- AND A WORTHY COMPANION TO THE INCREDIBLE HULK AND THE FANTASTIC FOUR!
ALL IN THE MAGNIFICENT MARVEL STYLE!

A GIFT FOR YOU INSIDE!
FREE! SUPERHERO TRANSFERS FREE!
THE AVENGERS
6p
EARTH-SHATTERING FIRST ISSUE!
No 1 WEEK ENDING SEPTEMBER 22 1973
FIGHTING TOGETHER
FOR THE VERY FIRST TIME IN THEIR OWN MAGAZINE!
THE WORLD'S GREATEST SUPERHEROES!
HE'S BACK! DOCTOR STRANGE MASTER OF BLACK MAGIC!
THE INVINCIBLE IRON MAN: IS HE HUMAN?... OR?
THOR
CAPTAIN AMERICA
WHO IS HE? WHAT IS HE?
DON'T MISS THE ASTONISHING GIANT-MAN

names with the strips as the weeks went by. Inevitably, the successful house style of the US monthlies was also sought for the new weekly, starting right there in the first issue in the rather frenzied-titled 'Stan Lee Speaks! ' column.

Of course many had seen all this before. Yet many of a certain age hadn't, and the clear intention is a 'Year Zero' approach to the UK. Those jumping on board for that very first time here or in the weeks and months ahead would feel the freshness this new endeavour had at its heart and embodied in those early Marvel strips. For them this was a bold, exciting new world unfolding on a weekly basis. Cheap, inferior reprints? It's only later that these readers would know or even care about any wider context.

This would also seem very much a British weekly to those readers, bought at the newsagents alongside other weekly fare with adverts for stamp collecting, Hornby train sets and Action Man (not GI Joe). Alongside ads for Inside Football and Striker there'd be offers of Kevin Keegan, Peter Osgood or Franny Lee t-shirts (yours for only 95p!). Even the free gifts (Green-Skinned Monster transfer instructions - can be boiled, spin-dried or dry cleaned) seemed to cement the Britishness, brought home by the anglicisation of the original american slang and spellings in the strips themselves, something the Odhams titles had also sought to address.

Yet presenting a coherent unfolding universe for new readers would require quick adjustments. Instead of a Ditko-rendered Captain America (yet to be formally introduced into British Marvel) making a single panel appearance alongside Rick Jones in an early Hulk strip, readers of MWOM #15 were presented with a 'Dean Wilkerson' (presumably Rick's tutor). The admirable intention is clear; editorial did not want a new young readership confused. It's only with hindsight that such slight of hand can be seen for what it was, a sticking plaster shoring up a leaking dam.

The new 'Mighty Marvel Mailbag' letters page soon burst at the seams with burning topics that had originally spread like wildfire through early US Marvel fandom - 'just who is the strongest, Hulk or Thing?' - now replicated here. As each week went by readers were also teased with 'another smashing clue' as to their free mystery gift (...it's bigger than a breadbox!...it rhymes with toaster!) whilst invited to cut up their beloved copies and collect the necessary coupons. Once revealed, the rather impressive John Buscema poster was, at this point, exclusive to the UK. It proved to be just the first of similar merchandise already available stateside that was quickly making its way to warehouses in the UK. Soon the floodgates would truly be opened.

Due to the early production of annuals in the UK it's probable that Fleetway's 'Marvel Annual' of that year came off the presses long before the first weekly issue emerged. Featuring the Hulk, FF, Spiderman and (rather bizarrely) Conan, the 128-page tome also featured a small editorial article (It's a Marvellous World - step up the hill of adventure and meet the folks who live in Marvel land). With images of Daredevil and Iron Man and name checks for the likes of Nick Fury, Black Panther, the Inhuman's and others, readers were given a first tantalising taste of things to come.

It seemed inevitable that the UK line would expand following such a successful launch and the first move seemed obvious. The hugely successful Spiderman (even known to many outside the readership through a great cartoon doing the rounds on some ITV networks) made the swing into the eponymously-named Spiderman Comics Weekly (SMCW) launched week-ending February 17th 1973. With back-up coming from (as his own strip briefly labelled him) Thor, the Mighty the look and feel of the new title mirrored its companion comic almost identically, with a full length main feature and red/white duotone pages the only noticeable differences. Alongside the initial free gifts (a Spiderman mask and tracer plane) the nations youth were again invited to collect coupons for another free mystery gift (revealed in #11 as a rather

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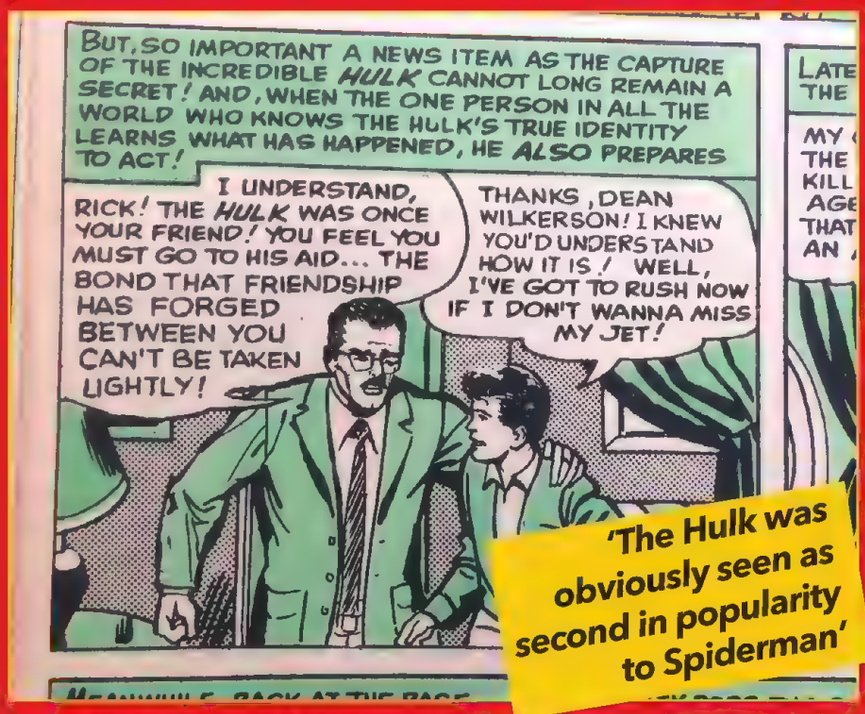
BUT, SO IMPORTANT A NEWS ITEM AS THE CAPTURE OF THE INCREDIBLE HULK CANNOT LONG REMAIN A SECRET! AND, WHEN THE ONE PERSON IN ALL THE WORLD WHO KNOWS THE HULK'S TRUE IDENTITY LEARNS WHAT HAS HAPPENED, HE ALSO PREPARES TO ACT!
I UNDERSTAND, RICK! THE HULK WAS ONCE YOUR FRIEND! YOU FEEL YOU MUST GO TO HIS AID... THE BOND THAT FRIENDSHIP HAS FORGED BETWEEN YOU CAN'T BE TAKEN LIGHTLY!
THANKS, DEAN WILKERSON! I KNEW YOU'D UNDERSTAND HOW IT IS! WELL, I'VE GOT TO RUSH NOW IF I DON'T WANNA MISS MY JET!

**'The Hulk was obviously seen as second in popularity to Spiderman'**

bizarre-looking Spiderman photo/poster as well as finally being given the opportunity to join one Marvel fan club F.O.O.M! [...] I've no coalescence! I'm willing to take advantage of you big hearted boobs! So here's my measly 50p - rush my big bargain FOOM membership kit immediately sir. [...] The launch of the new title itself seemed timed to perfection as the Lee/Ditko Spiderman strip began a run with classic new villains such as Electro, the Enforcers, Mysterio, the Green Goblin and Kraven the Hunter alongside the memorable first encounter with the Sinister Six. The 'Web and the Hammer' letters page was soon ringing the new titles' praises with even 'Thor, up against the Stone Men from Saturn' praise. Tomorrow Man, still gaining a solid fanbase.

As the house ads reminded us MWOM wasn't exactly standing still. Replacing Spiderman with Daredevil, the Man Without Fear ensured work from the likes of Bill Everett, Joe Colletta and Wally Wood would be gracing its pages in the coming weeks. The title had actually never looked better, with Jim Starlin, in some early work for Marvel, continuing to produce the goods with some classic original covers. Alongside Daredevil, the first (and best) Leader saga continued, hurtling towards its climax in the Hulk strip as the FF carried on against a run of classic foes, alongside their own historic first meeting with the Hulk. An unusual occasion around this time were the wonderful mini posters presented on the centre-fold centre pages which, during their brief life span sought to guide themselves on a weekly basis (one mini-poster, Mar-

then... three, followed by a giant mini-poster, then an even bigger mini-Air... and Competitions also came to the fore at this point. If not tempted by the chance of winning a Spiderman LP (question - who wears the cap in Sladed?) or a Raleigh Chopper Mk> (England won the World Cup in... ?) surely most readers leapt at the chance to win the big one - £1.00 pocket money every week for a year! Other weeks saw merchandise be it poster, letter kit, bow tie medallion on offer. With all the competitions, offers, mini-posters, record covers (please Mr Newsagent - reserve my copy of Mighty World Of Marvel every week!) it's amazing just how many of these things turn up intact for sale online - a whole generation of kids and their parents enticed as they were to take us scissors and slice their comics to shreds.

Change was quick in coming. After only a dozen issues Daredevil suddenly disappeared to be replaced by a second Hulk strip, who also took up sole residency of the cover. By #38 onwards the actual title of the comic had shrunk to accommodate the longer font '...starring the Incredible HULK', the beginning of a dominance that would remain for pretty much the rest of the decade. The Hulk was obviously seen as second in popularity to Spiderman, yet judging by the initial wave of letters published it seemed many weren't happy, even if some writing in couldn't resist that rather cool 'Here Comes the Incredible Hulk' Hasbro offer.

Inflation and rising costs began to impact from July 1973 with both MWOM and SMCW suddenly featuring full back and white Warriors before shrinking down to 32 pages. Yet the impression remained one of continued expansion with talk of a possible third weekly debuted on the letters pages

BUT, SO IMPORTANT A NEWS ITEM AS THE CAPTURE OF THE INCREDIBLE HULK CANNOT LONG REMAIN A SECRET! AND, WHEN THE ONE PERSON IN ALL THE WORLD WHO KNOWS THE HULK'S TRUE IDENTITY LEARNS WHAT HAS HAPPENED, HE ALSO PREPARES TO ACT!
I UNDERSTAND, RICK! THE HULK WAS ONCE YOUR FRIEND! YOU FEEL YOU MUST GO TO HIS AID... JUST AS BUCKY BARNES WOULD ONCE HAVE GONE TO MINE!
YOU STILL CAN'T FORGET YOUR DEAD PARTNER, BUCKY, CAN YOU, CAP?? WELL, I'VE GOT TO RUSH NOW IF I DON'T WANNA MISS MY JET!
LATER
THE
MY
THE
KILLE
AGE
THAT
AN

**'Captain America - yet to be formally introduced into British Marvel'**

Hulk strip in MWOM #46 reprinted Avengers #1 and continued with the Avengers storyline for the next few issues. A brief interruption of a Fantastic Four Hulk/Avengers crossover saw an appearance by the Uncanny X-Men with their 1963 origin issue split over two weeks. The status quo was quick to reassert itself however, leaving Professor X and his gifted students in UK limbo for a little while longer.

Instead, the time was ripe for The Avengers, with the titular third new weekly launching week-ending September 22nd 1973. Boasting 36 pages along with an innovative glossy cover (the catch being the 6p price tag) the early Lee/Kirby Mighty Avengers [illegible] what added to the mix here was the undoubted quality of back up feature [illegible] evolved, the strip's labyrinthine, inter-dimensional vistas even transcended what became a real issue with British Marvel around this time; a change in paper stock [illegible] problem was resolved before too long.

The Marvel Annual of that year, the last from [illegible] months earlier in MWOM. Yet showcasing the likes of the Daredevil origin or the first FF vs Hulk storyline again actually made [illegible] were accessed by a wider audience beyond [illegible] storylines only added to the quality of a final product that (to the soundtrack of that guy in a cap from Slade first enquiring if our [illegible] wrapped and placed under many a Yuletide tree in 1973.

1974 began with a move towards uniformity. January saw both MWOM and SMCW joining their new companion in the glossy cover/36 pages/6p price tag stakes [illegible] Iron Man strip. Many took umbrage with the main attractions diminished page count, even if (as we'll see) it was deemed a necessary move. Equilibrium was restored in MWOM as Daredevil finally returned with a Gene Colan rendered version of the origin story before continuing where things had left off. The Avengers evolved too, with the then-current Kung-Fu craze seeing Shang-Chi, Master Of Kung-Fu suddenly handed pride of place on the front cover, heralded in a font that rivalled the supposed-headliners own. Indeed the Avengers soon found themselves sharing equal billing not only with Shang-Chi but another Kung-Fu oriented strip, Iron Fist. Even Doctor Strange took his turn in sharing equal billing in a title that suddenly seemed to be struggling to find its own identity.

Yet in [illegible] identity for the whole of the UK line had perhaps already been forged by this point, with continuity proving to be troublesome. Needing to reintroduce the character of Rick Jones (about to play a big part in the first Avengers strips), a Hulk strip in MWOM [illegible] Marvel storyline with the title character airbrushed out, heavily rewritten dialogue and panel after panel of new and altered artwork. In a wider context, John Romita's run as Daredevil artist first appeared in MWOM #81 (April 1974) long after his later [illegible] (September 1973). The disparity in timelines and characterisation that the Marvel UK editorial had to continually [illegible] proving unwieldily. That they kept juggling at all is to their eternal credit.

Other inconsistencies were self inflicted. Presumably not wanting to conflict with a Sub-Mariner appearance in the Hulk strip, Daredevil's own clash with Namor was briefly bypassed, with readers presented with Stilt-Man from Daredevil #8 before getting to see the previous Namor storyline. [illegible] didn't help new readers following developments in characterisation. Yet at this stage British Marvel had use of an inventory (and the creative talent behind it) that could [illegible] Reading MWOM #77 and thinking the first [illegible] somehow didn't matter; the Wally Wood art [illegible] the time it would still seem 'the greatest comic ever.'

[illegible] expanding into other realms such as film [illegible] subjects such as vampires and werewolves suddenly becoming fair game. By the end of the year the UK line would mirror these trends, and with MWOM at #108, SMCW at #89 and the Avengers at #58, the line-up would welcome two new companion titles.

Yet the reasoning behind the earlier [illegible] was becoming more of a hot topic in the letters pages, highlighting the biggest challenge that lay ahead for the line as a [illegible] weeklies 'catch up' with the monthlies and you run out of stories to reprint?

**Matthew:** Apes, vampires and a sideways look at [illegible] superhero (in full colour!)

The MIGHTY MARVEL MAILBAG
Dear Stan,
I would like to compliment you on your three very good comics, The mighty World of Marvel, Spiderman Comics Weekly and The Avengers. But how about giving The X-Men a comic of their own, because I think they are a very good team? And perhaps you could bring Daredevil back as a supporting role.
get off the subject of
think your Marvel A
but why didn't Thor
you were horrible n
Annual, but there you

**'just who is the strongest, Hulk or Thing?'**

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**Welcome to the latest Tripwire Presents TV and Film section of Comic Scene UK. Each issue we shall be offering the best in TV and film coverage in the pages of the magazine. This time around, it starts with a roundup of comic movies and TV coming our way in 2019...**

# From Shazam! To Deadly Class

**2018 was a massive year for comics film and TV and 2019 looks like it will be equally massive. Here's a few of the notable movies and TV shows coming over the next 12 months**

-

## Deadly Class

SyFy, Television starts 16 January
Set in a dark, heightened world against the backdrop of late '80s counterculture, *Deadly Class* follows the story of Marcus (Benjamin Wadsworth), a teen living on the streets who is recruited into Kings Dominion, an elite private academy where the world's top crime families send their next generations. Maintaining his moral code while surviving a ruthless curriculum, vicious social cliques and his own adolescent uncertainties soon proves to be vital. Based on the best-selling 2014 Image Comics graphic novel by Rick Remender and Wes Craig, *Deadly Class* is a coming-of-age journey full of ancient mystery and teen angst. *Deadly Class* stars Wadsworth (*Teen Wolf*), Benedict Wong (*Doctor Strange, Philip K. Dick's Electric Dreams*), Lana Condor ("'To All The Boys I've Loved Before," "X-Men: Apocalypse"), María Gabriela de Faría ("Yo Soy Franky," "Sitiados"), Luke Tennie ("Shock and Awe"). Produced by Joe and Anthony Russo (Avengers: Infinity War," "Captain America: Civil War"),

## Glass

Universal/ Walt Disney released 18 Jan
Directed by M Night Shymalan, this is the third film in the director's trilogy. Starring Bruce Willis, James McAvoy and Samuel L Jackson, this brings together the plot strands from Unbreakable and Split.

## The Umbrella Academy

Netflix, Television starts February
Based on the comic series created by Gerard Way and Gabriel Bá, published by Dark Horse Comics. Here's what Netflix said about it: A dysfunctional family of superheroes comes together to solve the mystery of their father's death, the threat of the apocalypse and more. Stars Ellen Page, Tom Hopper, Robert Sheehan, Emmy Raver-Lampman and David Castañeda. Developed by Steve Blackman.

## Doom Patrol

We got introduced to this motley group on DC Universe's Titans and it is getting its own show from 15 February. The cast includes Brendan Fraser, Timothy Dalton, Matt Bomer, Diane Guerrero and Alan Tudyk.

## Captain Marvel

Marvel's first female-led superhero movie acts as a bridge between Avengers: Infinity War and Avengers: Endgame. Starring Brie Larson as the hero and directed by Anna Boden and Ryan Fleck, this 1990s set Marvel movie also features Jude Law, Gemma Chan and Samuel L Jackson. Captain Marvel finds herself in the middle of an intergalactic war.

## Shazam!

DC's first movie of 2019 comes after Aquaman has just cleaned up at the box office. Directed by David Sandberg, Zachari Levi plays the eponymous hero, whose alter ego is Billy Batson, a teenage orphan played by Asher Angel. Captain Marvel. Here's Warner Bros' synopsis: We all have a superhero inside us, it just takes a bit of magic to bring it out. In Billy Batson's (Asher Angel) case, by shouting out one word–SHAZAM!–this streetwise 14-year-old foster kid can turn into the adult Super Hero Shazam (Zachary Levi), courtesy of an ancient wizard. Still a kid at heart–inside a ripped, godlike body–Shazam revels in this adult version of himself by doing what any teen would do with

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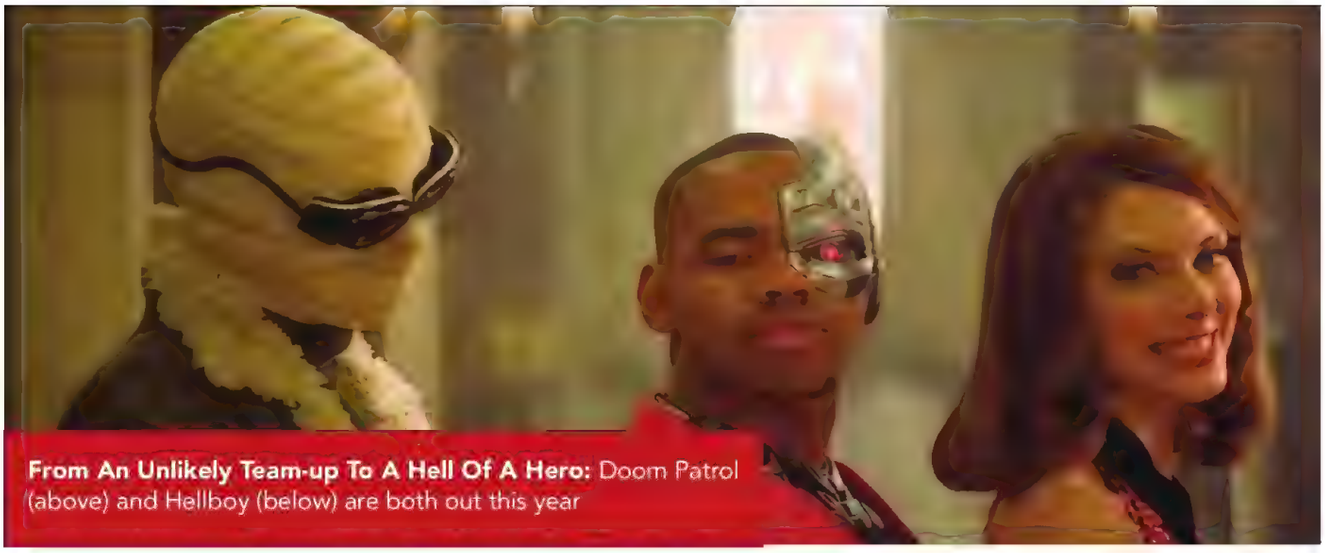

**From An Unlikely Team-up To A Hell Of A Hero:** Doom Patrol (above) and Hellboy (below) are both out this year

superpowers: have fun with them! Can he fly? Does he have X-ray vision? Can he shoot lightning out of his hands? Can he skip his social studies test? Shazam sets out to test the limits of his abilities with the joyful recklessness of a child. But he'll need to master these powers quickly in order to fight the deadly forces of evil controlled by Dr. Thaddeus Sivana (Mark Strong). *Shazam!* also stars Jack Dylan Grazer (*IT*) as Billy's best friend and ultimate superhero enthusiast, Freddy, part of the foster family that includes Mary, played by Grace Fulton (*Annabelle: Creation*); Darla, played by Faithe Herman (TV's *This is Us*) and Pedro, played by Jovan Armand (TV's *Hawaii Five-O*). Ron Cephas Jones (*This is Us*) plays the Wizard.

### Hellboy

Neil Marshall's reboot of Mike Mignola's horror creation comes out at last this April. With David Harbour (*Stranger Things*) donning the horns and Ian McShane as Professor Trevor Broom, this does look like a different beast (pardon the pun) to del Toro's two movies. Also stars Milla Jojovich, Sacha Lane and Daniel Dae Kim.

### Avengers: Endgame

*Avengers: Infinity War* grossed over $1bn at the box office last year and so this will probably be another huge hit for Marvel. Following on from *Infinity War* and *Captain Marvel*, directed again by the Russo Brothers and starring Chris Evans, Robert Downey Jr, Benedict Cumberbatch and more, this is the end of the current phase of Marvel movies.

### Swamp Thing

DC's most famous swamp monster, created by Len Wein and Berni Wrightson, is joining Titans on the DC Universe streaming platform. Coming in May of this year, with executive producers Mark Verheiden, Gary Dauberman, James Wan, Michael Clear, Len Wiseman and starring Andy Bean, Crystal Reed, Virginia Madsen and Derek Mears.

### X-Men: Dark Phoenix

Based on one of the most iconic X-Men stories by Chris Claremont and John Byrne, this Fox mutant movie directed by Simon Kinberg sees the X-Men face their most formidable and powerful foe when one of their own, Jean Grey, starts to spiral out of control. During a rescue mission in outer space, Jean is nearly killed when she's hit by a mysterious cosmic force. Once she returns home, this force not only makes her infinitely more powerful, but far more unstable. The X-Men must now band together to save her soul and battle aliens that want to use Grey's new abilities to rule the galaxy. Stars: Sophie Turner, Jessica Chastain, Jennifer Lawrence, James McAvoy and Michael Fassbender

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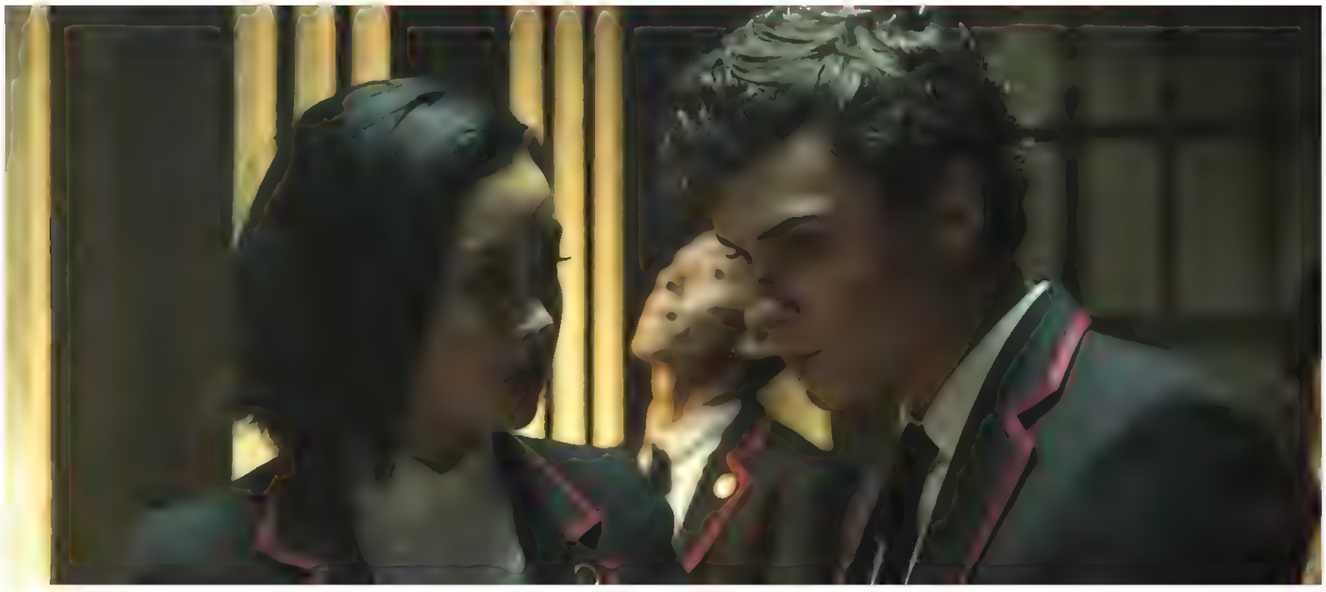
# Killer Class



***Deadly Class* is a hit comic from creators Rick Remender and Wes Craig, published by Image and from this January it's now a SyFy TV show produced by the directors of *Avengers: Infinity War* and *Avengers: Endgame*, the Russo Brothers. Joel Meadows takes a look at its genesis and development...**

SyFy has already brought Grant Morrison and Darick Robertson's Image Comics series *Happy!* to the small screen. So it seemed a perfect fit to do the same with Rick Remender and Wes Craig's *Deadly Class*, also an Image series.

*Deadly Class*, about orphan Marcus (Benjamin Wadsworth) who finds himself joining a school for teenage assassins, did seem like a natural fit for television. The channel has been behind it from the start, as Remender recalls in an interview with him from cbr.com in July last year.

"The network is a wonderful group of people who love the book and are committed to translating it to the screen. They don't want to change the book or its voice. I'm co-showrunning and serving as lead writer, wrote the pilot with fellow EP Miles Feldsott, and have a lot of say when we break stories in the room. As it stands, the direction of the series is entirely true to the books.

They want to translate this book into a TV show, and you can tell that they want to feature heightened and prestige genres. *Deadly Class* is perfect for Syfy, as they're also doing amazing things with Superman, George R.R. Martin and Grant Morrison. They've got a lot of other very interesting things on the docket. So it's a really cool time to be with Syfy, as they're digging into the comic book space and trying to find really cool and noisy projects."

**"We wanted to make sure the show remained true to the book, and true to the characters that Wes and I created. So it was a hell of a lot of work."– Rick Remender**

For Remender, it was important that the TV series stuck closely to the comic, as he was at pains to point out in the same chat last year:

"We wanted to make sure the show and its voice remained true to the book, and true to the characters that Wes and I created. So it was a hell of a lot of work. We've been working on this TV show now for three and a half years. I lived in Vancouver for two and a half months while we were filming the pilot and was fully involved in the translation with this amazing group of people. We were very fortunate to have some of the best people in the industry working with us. It's been amazing, between the studio, cast, crew, the network, and the Russo's heavy involvement it's been great."

Moving the action from comics to TV has given Remender extra latitude that he wouldn't have had with the characters in the comics, he revealed in the CBR interview last summer:

"There's such a large cast that in order to do them all justice in the comic I have to be very mercenary about who gets what page time.

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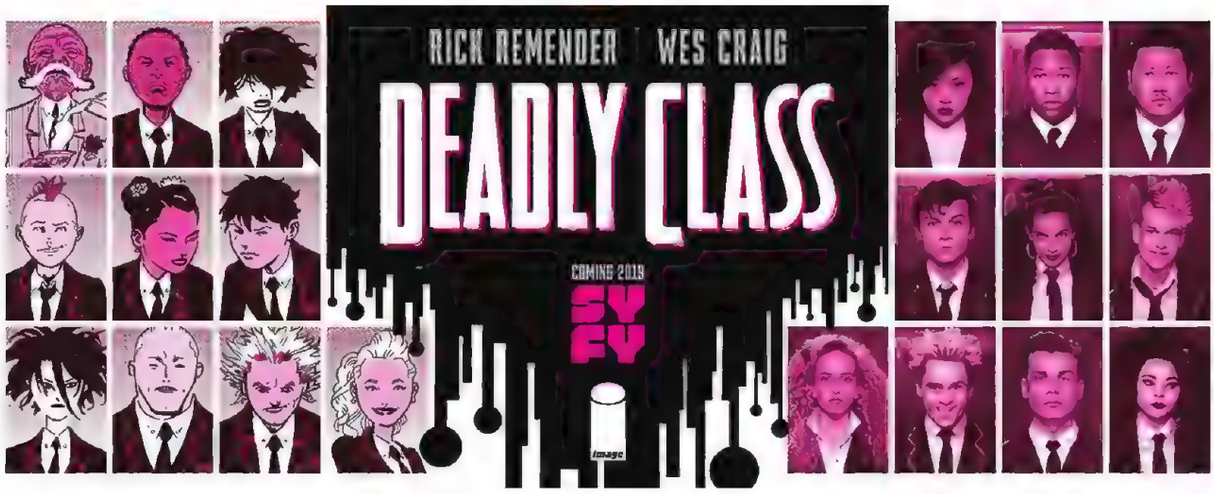


**Promo image:** Showing off the Deadly Class characters in the comic, art by Wes Craig (left) and the ones in the TV show (right)

The pilot is equivalent to the plot of three issues of the comic, and as we unpack the comic book into episodes you can fit a considerable amount more story into a TV show. So we'll be able to do the A story as well as adding B, C and D stories for the other characters. We'll unpack them and give them all their own arcs that are not necessarily entirely Marcus-centric. Marcus though is still our main P.O.V."

Back in October 2017, its artist Wes Craig talked to SyFy Wirer about the comic making the move to TV.

"It's a fascinating world, seeing it all come together. In comic, it only takes five creators, who say: 'Do you want to do a comic?' 'Yeah let's do a comic.' Then a month later you have one. I'm looking forward to seeing who they cast in the roles. I want to see the school. It's Marcus's first introduction in the first issue where he walks into the school and every other kid is giving him the stink eye."

Benedict Wong, from *Avengers: Infinity War* and *Doctor Strange*, plays the slightly enigmatic headmaster Master Lin and for him, it was his job to just follow what Remender and producer Miles Orion Feldshott's vision as he stated in an interview with comicbook.com last November:"My job is to get out of the way and just allow Rick and Miles's world to be realized," Wong stated. "They're strong characters. You've got this connection that happens between Marcus and Willie. It's like boys hamming up, being vulnerable. I know Lin said there's strength in power. There's strength in vulnerability, and this is that. There's a real connection there, what they have. I mean, obviously, through the story."

Back in September, the Russo brothers spoke about the show in a promo video released by SyFy themselves and they had a few insights to share.

"*Deadly Class* is one of the more twisted coming-of-age stories we've ever read," Joe Russo said in the video. "It does an amazing job of exploring teenage years and the sense of alienation that you feel. The first time we read the book we were blown away. That's why we're standing here working on the show."

**"Deadly Class is one of the more twisted coming-of-age stories we've ever read"– Joe Russo, Executive Producer**

Anthony Russo followed on from his brother: "There's a mix of a lot of different sensibilities spanning everything from our more intense action work in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* to like some of our more absurdist sensibilities."

*Deadly Class* began on SyFy on 16 January but they released the pilot a couple of weeks early to US residents on YouTube and the SyFy channel website to offer people a teaser for it. Early word is very positive and when I checked out the pilot, I could see that there is potential here. The only problem is that there is so much comic-related content on TV now that for shows to survive and flourish, they have to be exceptional and they also have to hit the ground running. The pilot for *Deadly Class* isn't bad but we shall have to see some things we haven't seen before on the big or small screen, otherwise it will just be a one season wonder. Time will tell.

*Deadly Class* started on SyFy from 16 January and runs weekly. *Deadly Class* is published monthly by Image Comics.

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# Flying High

**_Captain Marvel_ is the next Marvel Studios blockbuster movie, out this March, which acts as a bridge to Avengers: Endgame. JOEL MEADOWS takes a look at the background behind the studio's first female helmed movie...**

Last year was a pretty phenomenal year for Marvel Studios. *Black Panther* and *Avengers: Infinity War* grossed a staggering $3.5bn at the worldwide box office. So *Captain Marvel*, out on 8 March in UK cinemas, has a massive suit to fill. However, it acts as a direct bridge between *Avengers: Infinity War* and *Avengers: Endgame*, so cannily Marvel have made certain that filmgoers will have to see it.

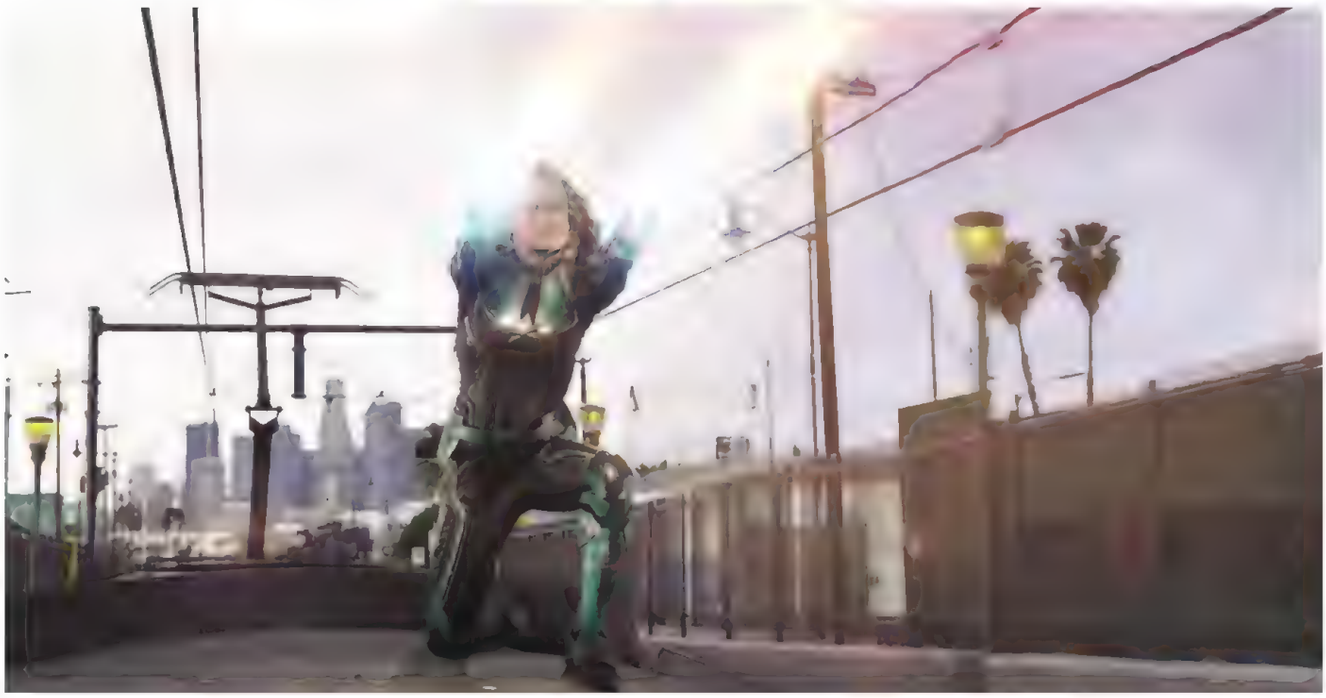
"Captain Marvel is about somebody who goes on a journey of discovery," the film's co-director Anna Boden pointed out in a video from Marvel very recently. "I think it was really important for Brie to learn how to fight," she continued.

Viewers are also going on a journey of discovery too. Introduced or alluded to at the end of *Avengers: Infinity War*, Captain Marvel is Carol Danvers (Brie Larson), a former US Air Forcer pilot who finds herself caught in the middle of an intergalactic war. The original Captain Marvel was created by Stan Lee and Gene Colan back in 1967 but revamped by Roy Thomas and Gil Kane a little later on. It took until 2012 when Carol Danvers, who was created as Ms Marvel, took over the mantle of Captain Marvel.

"Early predictions believe [Captain Marvel] will open with a very impressive $160m take. Set in 1995 with a younger looking Samuel L Jackson back as Nick Fury, head of S.H.I.E.L.D, Captain Marvel is stuck between two worlds "

*Captain Marvel* is Marvel Studios' first female-helmed movie but they probably don't have to worry about its box office success as early predictions believe it will open with a very impressive $160m take. Set in 1995 with a younger looking Samuel L Jackson back as Nick Fury, head of S.H.I.E.L.D, Captain Marvel is a flawed Marvel hero, stuck between two worlds, as its star Larson revealed in a chat she did with *Entertainment Weekly* back in September last year.

"You have this Kree part of her that's unemotional, that is an amazing fighter and competitive," Larson pointed out. "Then there's this human part of her that



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Nick Fury (Samuel Jackson) meets Carol Danvers (Brie Larsen)

is flawed but is also the thing that she ends up leading by. It's the thing that gets her in trouble, but it's also the thing that makes her great. And those two sides warring against each other is what makes her her."

Her identity and her quest to come to terms with who she is is very much at the heart of the film, the actress explained in the same EW interview.

"That is something that is really exciting to me about this film: We did not cut corners on that stuff. Like, when it's funny, it is funny, but also when there's deep emotional things happening, it's real. So I was able to bring some of those same things that I've brought to full dramatic roles into this, which I'm really proud of because I think it will really set this film apart."

It was the honesty displayed by the character here which appealed to the actress, she admitted in the same EW interview last year.

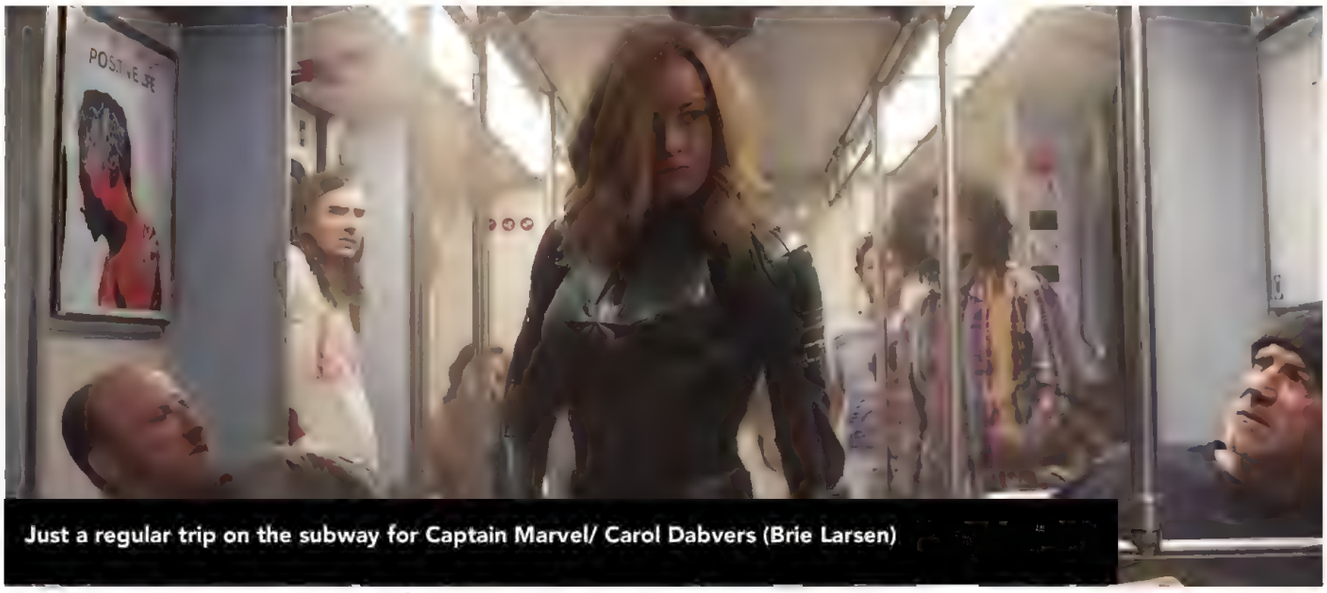
"I was able to bring some of those same things that I've brought to full dramatic roles into this, which I'm really proud of because I think it will really set this film apart" - Brie Larsen

"Just seeing a character who says how she feels and says what's on her mind and doesn't let people stand in her way is incredibly empowering," Larson says. And becoming the face of a Marvel superhero doesn't hurt, either: The first time she put on the Captain Marvel suit, she says, her first thought was, "Whoa, am I going to be a character at Disneyland?"

Samuel L Jackson, who plays Nick Fury again, says that the character here is less jaded than usual, he admitted in a recent chat with comicbook.com.

"He hasn't grown into his cynicism quite yet. His job right now, his place in the world is to find out where the next enemy's coming from. And like most sane human beings with a job like that, you figure the next enemy is some other country or somewhere else," Jackson explained.

With its release coming in less than six weeks' time as of this publication, it seems likely that this may be the first time we see Captain Marvel in her own adventure but it is pretty much guaranteed that it won't be the last. It looks like it's going to be another recordbreaking year for Marvel Studios. *Captain Marvel* comes out on 8 March.



Just a regular trip on the subway for Captain Marvel/ Carol Dabvers (Brie Larsen)

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# It Never Rains But It Pours

***The Umbrella Academy* is a brand new Netflix series based on the Dark Horse Comics series by Gerard Way and Gabriel Ba, coming to the service this February. JOEL MEADOWS takes a look at its development...**

Gerard Way is a figure with a significant following, thanks to his time at the front of EMO band My Chemical Romance. But in recent years, he has turned his hand to another love of his, comics. DC even launched a new imprint, the now defunct Young Animal under his aegis. *The Umbrella Academy* is Way's superhero series with a twist, drawn and co-created by Gabriel Bá and published by Dark Horse Comics. And just like so many other comic series, it is making the leap to the small screen this year.

*The Umbrella Academy* has appeared in three comic series from Dark Horse Comics, all created by Way and Bá. Here is wikipedia's description of the TV show: On the same day in 1989, forty-three infants are inexplicably born to random, unconnected women who showed no signs of pregnancy the day before. Seven are adopted by Sir Reginald Hargreeves, a billionaire industrialist, who creates The Umbrella Academy and prepares his "children" to save the world. But not everything went according to plan. In their teenage years, the family fractured and the team disbanded. Now, the six surviving thirty-something members reunite upon the news of Hargreeves' passing. Luther, Diego, Allison, Klaus, Vanya and Number Five work together to solve a mystery surrounding their father's death. But the estranged family once again begins to come apart due to their divergent personalities and abilities, not to mention the imminent threat of a global apocalypse.

**"*The Umbrella Academy* has appeared in three comic series from Dark Horse Comics, all created by Way and Ba... The show has taken a few liberties with the plots from the comic. But it is inevitable that properties change from one medium to another."**

The show has taken a few liberties with the plots from the comic. For a start, the first *Umbrella Academy* comic was set in 1977. But it is inevitable that properties change from one medium to another. In an interview with Collider

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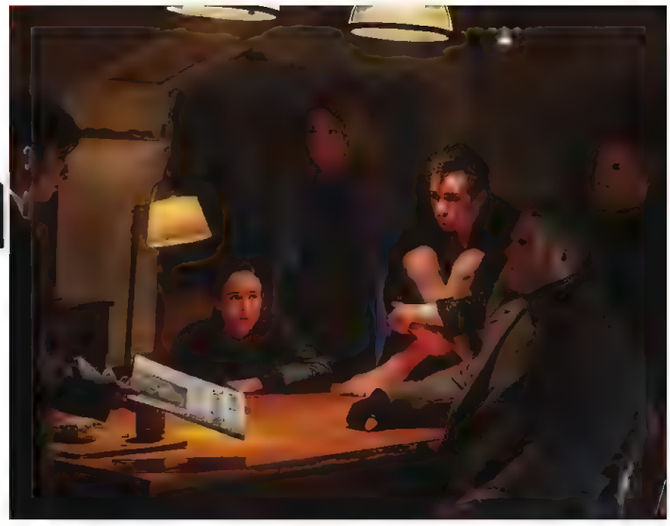


this January, Way explained how he presented all the *Umbrella Academy* comic information to the programme makers: What I did for Steve Blackman (the showrunner) and the writers in that first writers room was to create an eighteen page document that laid everything out. Even of the graphic novels that haven't come out yet. Which should equal eight when we're all done. So I gave them the blueprint for what happens, because you do want to seed certain things in there for future series and the hope is that it's a success so that you do a lot more of these. They're very curious what Gabriel and I are doing next. We always send them the new comics. They really want to know what's happening."

In the same interview, Way laid out what they wanted to achieve with the transfer from comics to television: "I think what we wanted to accomplish in the move was to see these characters expanded and the story told in longer form so you get more out of it, you get to spend more time with the characters."

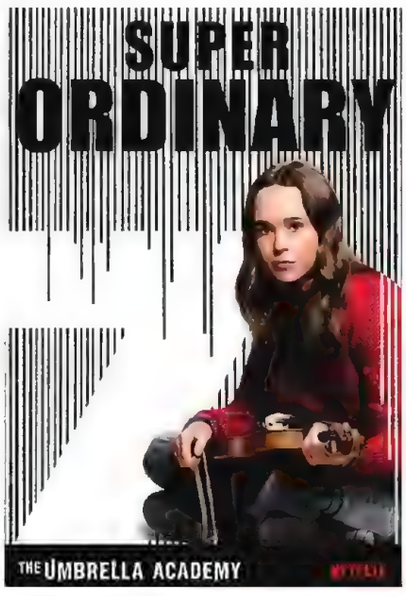
**"I think what we wanted to accomplish in the move was to see these characters expanded and the story told in longer form so you get more out of it, you get to spend more time with the characters" – Gerard Way**

Bá also elaborated on this in the same chat to Collider:"[We wanted to] expand the world visually. We're going to reach a lot more people who haven't read the comic and to introduce this to new people, which was our biggest challenge," Bá revealed.

Way seems to be very positive about the TV show as he explained to Collider: "I think one of my favourite things about the show are that they kept the weird ideas. There's some really heady concepts to get your head around."

*The Umbrella Academy* is a very quirky comic series and we shall know after 15 February if the TV version has worked. In an age when we are bombarded with so much comic-related content, I am hopeful that this will stand out from the rest.

*The Umbrella Academy* begins on 15 February on Netflix.



**Promo posters for the series (above right and left) and a variant cover for the most recent comic series, Hotel Oblivion**

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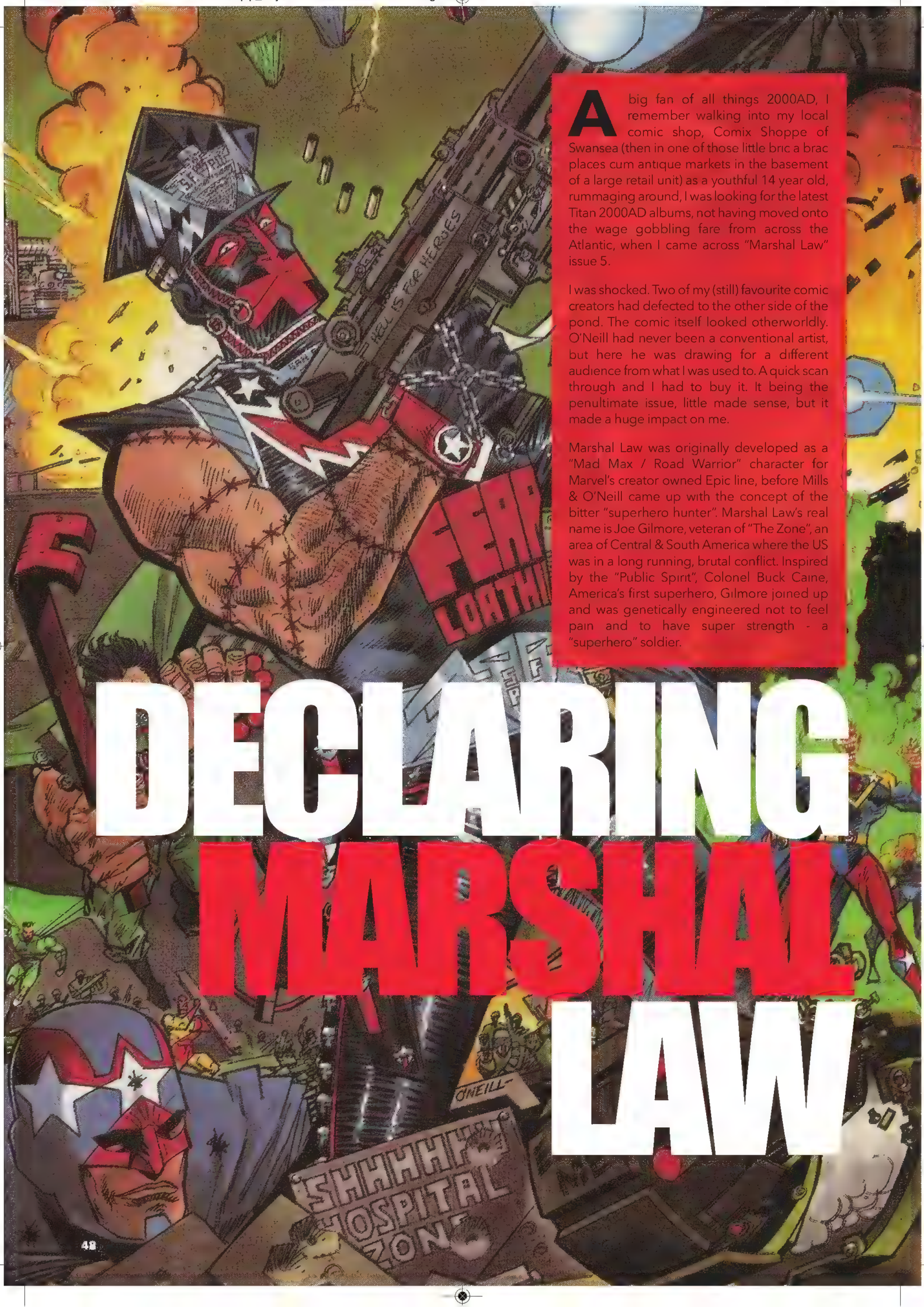



# DECLARING MARSHAL LAW

A big fan of all things 2000AD, I remember walking into my local comic shop, Comix Shoppe of Swansea (then in one of those little bric a brac places cum antique markets in the basement of a large retail unit) as a youthful 14 year old, rummaging around, I was looking for the latest Titan 2000AD albums, not having moved onto the wage gobbling fare from across the Atlantic, when I came across "Marshal Law" issue 5.

I was shocked. Two of my (still) favourite comic creators had defected to the other side of the pond. The comic itself looked otherworldly. O'Neill had never been a conventional artist, but here he was drawing for a different audience from what I was used to. A quick scan through and I had to buy it. It being the penultimate issue, little made sense, but it made a huge impact on me.

Marshal Law was originally developed as a "Mad Max / Road Warrior" character for Marvel's creator owned Epic line, before Mills & O'Neill came up with the concept of the bitter "superhero hunter". Marshal Law's real name is Joe Gilmore, veteran of "The Zone", an area of Central & South America where the US was in a long running, brutal conflict. Inspired by the "Public Spirit", Colonel Buck Caine, America's first superhero, Gilmore joined up and was genetically engineered not to feel pain and to have super strength - a "superhero" soldier.

The harsh reality of the superpower programme and America's expedition to "The Zone" is that many of the young men who went to fight came back maimed, both physically and mentally. Suffering from PTSD, often homeless and disturbed, many of these men formed roving gangs in the ruins of San Francisco, terrorising the local population. Gilmore, himself suffering mentally from his service, came back and became the hero hunter "Marshal Law", a vigilante licensed by San Futuro Police Department and commanded by the corrupt and venal Commissioner McGland to combat the rogue supers.

"Marshal Law" is Mills and O'Neill completely off the leash. It could be summed up as Mills's superhero psychotherapy, his opportunity to vent his complete hatred of superheroes, which oddly isn't shared by O'Neill.

Marshal Law is not a particularly sympathetic "hero". Dressed up in leather, with barbed wire wrapped around his right arm for penance and self flagellation for the crimes he committed in "The Zone". Obsessed with feeling betrayed by his inspiration the Public Spirit, and filled with self hatred, he is determined to prove that Caine is the notorious superpowered rapist and murderer - the Sleepman. Law is sent over the edge when the Sleepman rapes and kills Gilmore's activist girlfriend Lynn. This leads to the revelation of a conspiracy of silence and a confrontation with both the Sleepman & the Public Spirit

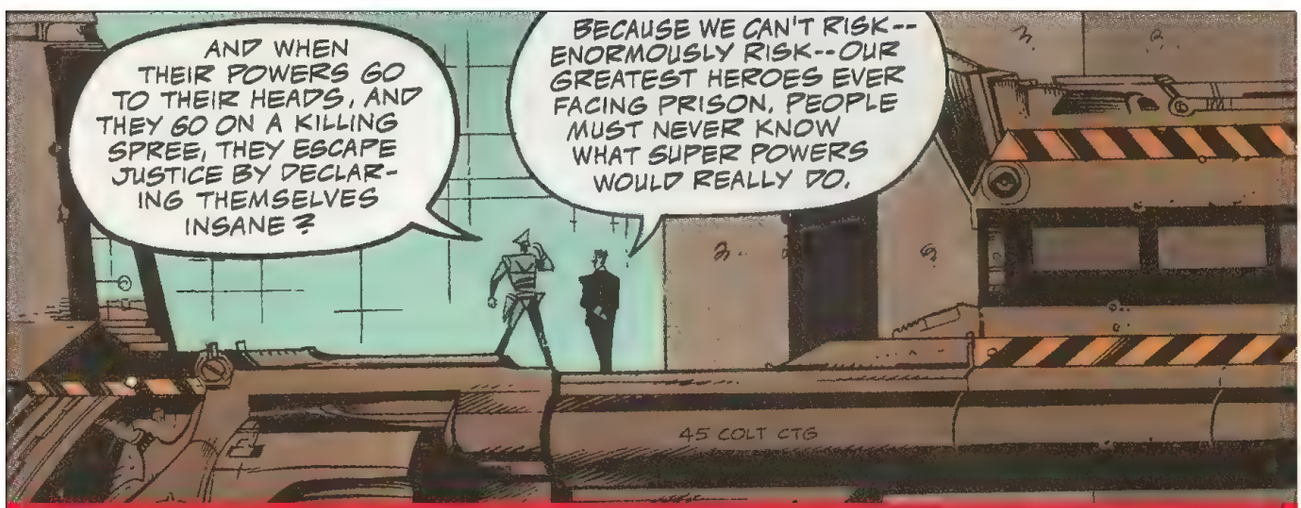
"Fear & Loathing" doesn't stop at superheroes. All of Mills & O'Neill's pet hates are present, US foreign policy ("the Zone" is analogous with Vietnam and more specifically the US policy on intervening in central and South American nations), genetics, drug use, (bad) science and religion. Mills has never been subtle, preferring to use the choleric chainsaw or axe of analysis rather than the scalpel of satire, his talent for research comes to the fore, and he informs the reader whilst attacking his targets without submitting them to "soapboxing" and information overload. All of this is enhanced by O'Neill's often grotesque, yet beautiful pages. Figures are twisted, contorted and exaggerated; buildings are ostentatious, suggestive and almost surreal. Occasionally tasteless, lurid and on occasion extremely violent, the series brings to mind a hard edged Russ Meyer film, but with more phallic symbolism, even more cleavage and violence.

The six parter ends on a nihilistic note. Clearly marshal Law wasn't going to lose, but did he really win? He's in a hell of a mess, and the ending is down beat fitting nicely with the contemporary trend for grim and gritty. A "modern" (30 years old admittedly) classic and still relevant today.

The 1989 one shot sequel, "Crime & Punishment : Marshal Law Takes Manhattan", sees our favourite vigilante venturing to New York to experience the Big Apple's capes. Marshal Law visits a home for disturbed superheroes looking to bring "the Persecutor" to justice , an unhinged vigilante who was Gilmore's commanding officer in "The zone", and bears more than a passing resemblance to a certain Marvel gun toting hero with a skull motif. Mills and O'Neill mercilessly lampoon Stan, Jack (and Steve's) merry marvel marching society, the art is less effective compared with " Fear & Loathing", as it doesn't benefit from O'Neill's colouring, and is partly inked by "Aliens" artist Mark A. Nelson

Barring a reprint in Marvel UKs short lived mature readers fortnightly "Strip" reprinting the "Fear & Loathing" 6 issue mini, by 1990s, Law's next appearance was at Apocalypse, an imprint of Trident Comics, soon to be home of "Toxic". The first fruit of this union was the one shot "Kingdom of the Blind". Mills & O'Neill turning their attention to the flying rat impersonator from Gotham. Billionaire newspaper publisher Scott Brennan has the worst kept secret in San Futuro, he is the brutal vigilante "Private Eye". As a newspaper owner, Brennan uses the power of the press to attack politicians, supports his superhero friends and furthers his own agenda. Bizarrely, Marshal Law admires brennan and his as "Private Eye". But when Law's sidekick, Kiloton, discovers why Private eye's sidekicks keep disappearing and that his charitable adoption of young orphans is not altruistic, the Marshal decides to take him down.

This then led into Marshal Law "the Hateful Dead", the lead story in the short lived, and much missed (by me at least) weekly, creator owned and over reaching comic "Toxic". His appearance in the comic was short lived. "The Hateful Dead" saw Marshal Law taking on dead superheroes risen from the grave to wreak (reek?) havoc in San Futuro. Seemingly topping himself at the end to be with his resurrected,


AND WHEN THEIR POWERS GO TO THEIR HEADS, AND THEY GO ON A KILLING SPREE, THEY ESCAPE JUSTICE BY DECLARING THEMSELVES INSANE?
BECAUSE WE CAN'T RISK--ENORMOUSLY RISK--OUR GREATEST HEROES EVER FACING PRISON, PEOPLE MUST NEVER KNOW WHAT SUPER POWERS WOULD REALLY DO.
45 COLT CTG

**" In the old days, there was always a *friendly* neighbourhood cop on the sidewalk. Now there's me "** *- Martial Law*

undead, girlfriend Lynn, it appeared to be the end for our vigilante. This was a bit staid, the art and humour were all present, but it wasn't as savage as previous excursions and felt like it was going through the motions, overshadowed by fresher strips like Mills, Skinner and Edmond's "Accident Man"

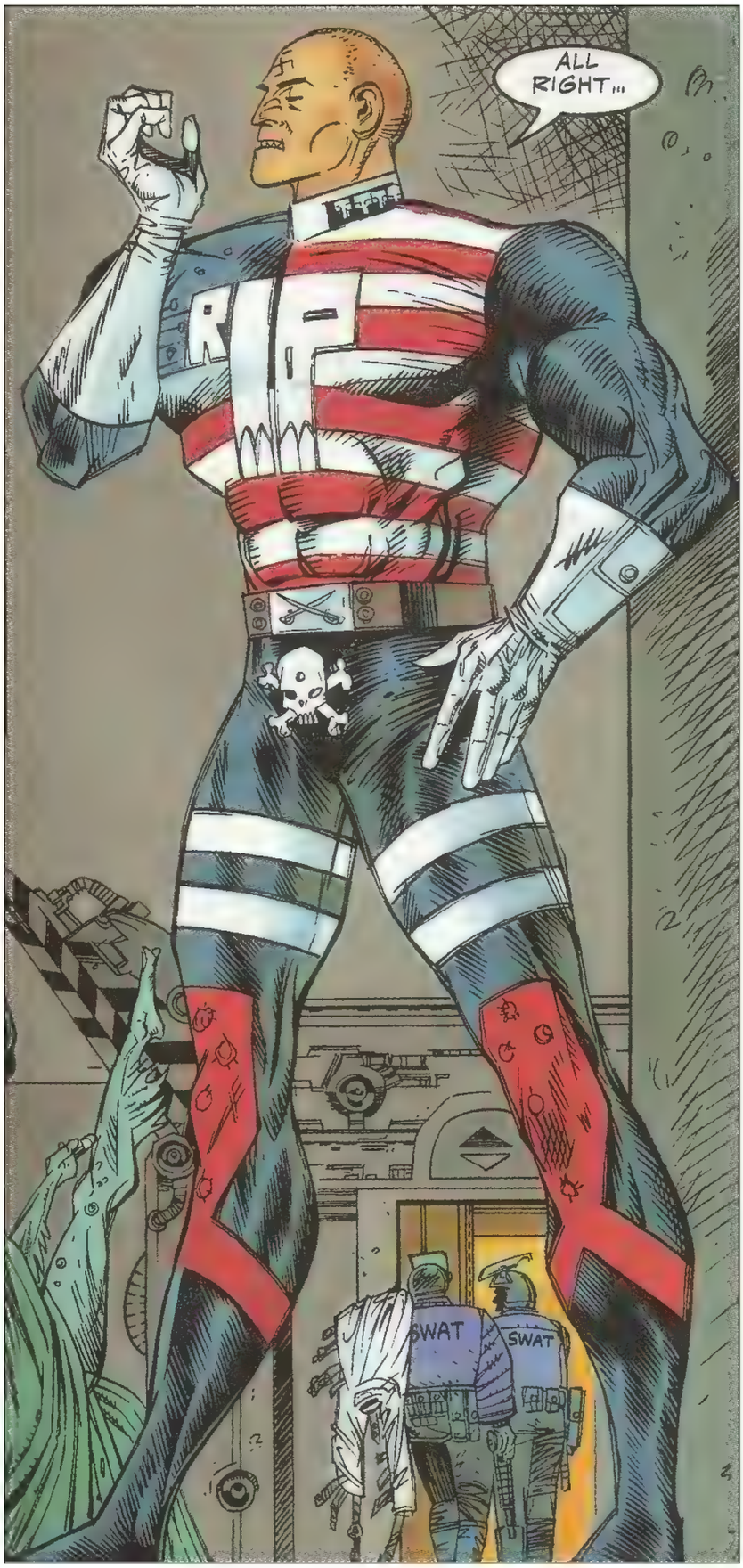
"Toxic" soon went to the wall, all detailed in John McShane's two part article in issue 0 and 1 of this very organ - buy it here www.comicscene.tictail.com

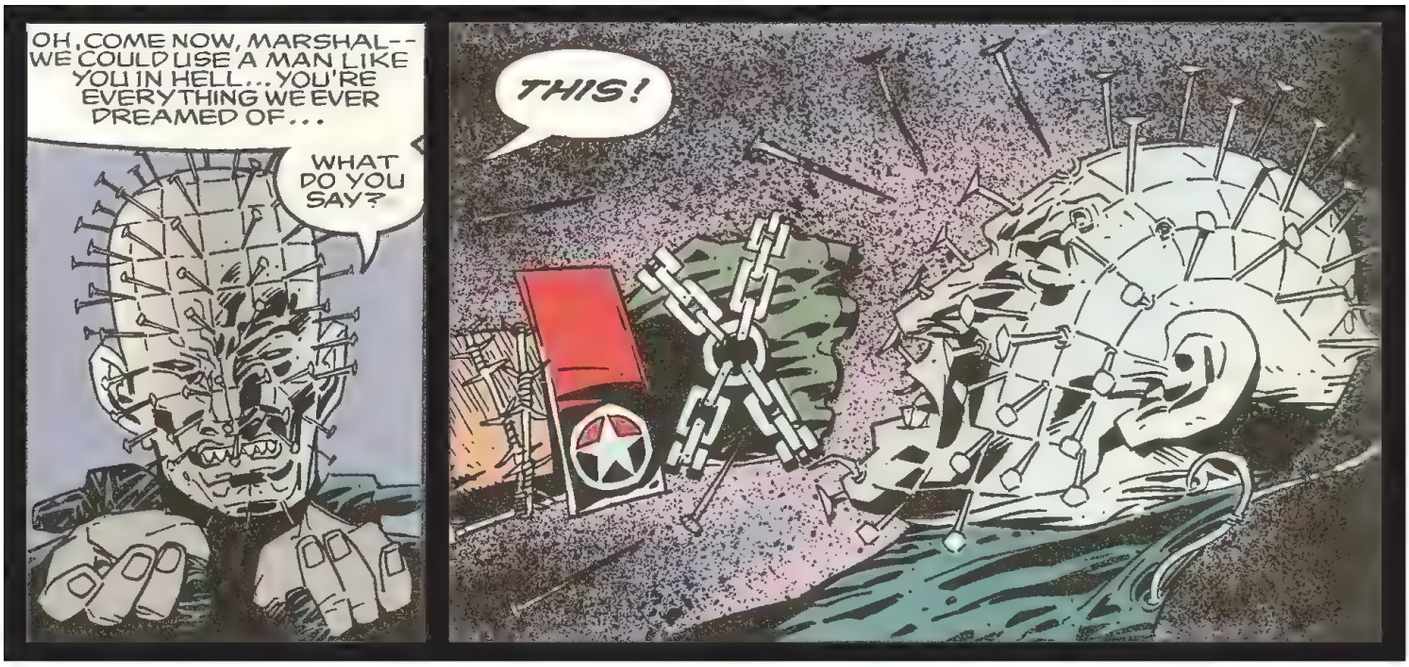
Homeless, "Marshal Law" along with a number of other "Toxic" refugees ("Sex Warrior", "Accident Man") headed to US publisher Dark Horse. "The Hateful Dead" was collected and a sequel, the 48 page "Super Babylon" was published in 1992. Law was not dead, just faking it, but zombie plague had spread to San Futuro's museum dedicated to the Golden Age superheroes, stuffed and mounted for posterity, and now reanimated and "undead". Cue lots of jokes about the Golden Age Public Spirit the "Captain America" analogue blowing their Bucky analogue's bugle. It started to seem like we had seen it all before, the strip was in danger of becoming a series of (predictable) jokes about superheroes strung together by the most threadbare of plots.

The next story took pot shots at another DC institution. In 1993's "Marshal Law : Secret Tribunal" we follow "growing boy" the latest proposition for the teenage "League of Heroes", a thinly disguised "Legion of Superheroes", as he gets sent to the "Public Spirit's" derelict starship "Cape of good Hope" on a dare as part of his induction, little suspecting that the ship is inhabited by lethal alien lifeforms. growing boy barely escapes with his life and marshal Law and super hero team - the Secret Tribunal, head into the ship to clean house. Legion story, told from the perspective of the prospective legion candidates, some adult (some would say puerile) humour, spectacular art from O'Neill and a thinly veiled mash up with "Aliens" makes a fun package.

Around the same time, and possibly in an attempt to raise his profile, our favourite super powered vigilante, with a very large chip on his shoulder, crossed universes and even went to hell in 3 crossover mini series.

In 1993, first up was the embossed covered (this was the 90s) "Marshal Law vs. Pinhead", putting our favourite hero hunter against






Clive Barker's pinhead, O'Neill coloured by Steve Buccellato. Marsh' has shacked up with Supernova, an Amazonian and new agey like a superpowered Gwyneth Paltrow. Everything is going well, until she and Joe get inadvertently transported to Pinhead's Hell, where pain is everything, and where Joe, being a genetically enhanced war veteran can no longer feel pain, chases it. Mills and O'Neill play up that "synergy" and flesh out Pinheads' First World War origin. This is surreal and disturbing, but just too short.

In 1997 we had the black and white Image published "Savage Dragon and Marshal Law". Erik Larsen's green finned one inexplicably travels 25 years into the future to San Futuro. A killer is stalking the city committing "10 Commandment" themed murders. It ties directly into ML continuity with some substantial changes to the cast and following on directly from the "Secret Tribunal" mini. "The Savage Dragon" is pretty much surplus to requirements here, perhaps only used as a big name draw to attract attention to the Marshal. By the end of the strip, Law has become more sympathetic to the plight of those "gifted" with superpowers and the psychological effect it can have on them, and the "Savage Dragon" returns to his own time, never to be mentioned again.

Finally, there was 1998's "The Mask & Marshal Law", Dark Horse's flash in the pan house character meets the good Marshal with predictable consequences, coloured by Dave Stewart. Joe Gilmore is training his replacement, "Gale Force" and looking to retire Marshal Law. Little did he know, McGland and the government are experimenting with an artefact known as the "Mask" which imbues the wearer with reality warping powers. Marshal Law is called out of retirement for one last gig as his old friend, Danny Fallon who had been in a coma since "Fear & Loathing" is used as the test subject for the "Mask" and goes berserk. Much reality warping Tex Avery alike chaos ensues, but by the end Joe is firmly ensconced back in the Marshal Law outfit.

That was that until the short lived "Cool Beans" website started publishing Marshal Law text stories, written by Mills with illustrations by O'Neill, entitled "Day Of The Dead" and "The Cloak of Evil" co written by O'Neill later collected with a cover by Nick Percival. Joe is firmly back in place as the Marshal and loving life. But no new strips since "The Mask / Marshal Law".

Over the years the character has developed from being an emotionally troubled, disturbed, yet sympathetic war veteran who dresses like a Nazi, to the more hedonistic and pleasure, debauched vigilante of the text stories. The stories gradually become less sophisticated, and occasionally it's in danger of becoming a series of fights interspersed with crude superhero jokes. The later strips become more predictable and formulaic and you can see the "joins" in the plot; introduce famous superhero, show them up to be the scumbags they are, and they get offed, brutally, embarrassingly, or both. Usually followed by a few panels of polemic, the point being driven home with a piledriver. The invective becomes less pointed as the story progresses, the Marshal himself becomes less interesting, less conflicted, more one dimensional and the humour becomes more crude, (not that it was particularly sophisticated in the first place) less savage, more slapstick. It was better than that.

There are a few collections of the strips. A magnificent collection by DC of all the non crossover strips called "Marshal Law : The Deluxe Edition" published in 2012, Dark Horse (Titan in the UK) published Marshal Law "Blood Sweat & Fears" in 2003, but stops at "Super Babylon", and there is the Marvel / Epic collection of the original series "Marshal Law : Fear & Loathing" published in 1990 and republished by Titan in 2003. Sadly, none of the crossover work has been collected.

It's interesting that even though the character has only seen around 20 appearances, he has had so much of an impact though and remains a cult concern. But "Fear & Loathing" remains a bold, savage, though not altogether subtle attack on the concept of "heroes", science, religion and politics. The extended storyline of "Fear & Loathing" allows the story to breathe, it doesn't just feel like a string of attacks on superheroes (although there are lots of them) like the later strips do. It's like Mills & O'Neill managed to gather all of their favourite targets into one, beautifully illustrated comic. Classic.

**Author:** Luke Williams
**Twitter:** @lukeyspooksss
**Website:** 2000AD.wordpress.com

UGHH! THIS COMIC IS BORING! SO CLICHÉ
LOL
A BOT DAILY COMIC!
"GASP!" DID SOMEONE SAY BORING??
WHAT THE?!!
THERE'S NO PROBLEM STATING THE OBVIOUS, CHAP!
"PUFF"
"PUFF"
CALL A SPADE A SPADE, EH?
YOU KNOW WHAT? BECAUSE YOU'VE GOT SUCH A CHAMPION FACE, I'LL LET YOU IN ON A LITTLE SECRET...
OH BOY!!
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# THE STATE OF INDEPENDENTS

The UK's independent and small press comics scene has never been more exciting. We bring you a look at some of the best!

## "10 essential Comic Cons for 2019"

**Alex Thomas** gets his diary ready for the best events of the year!

Having looked back at the best of 2018 last issue, it's time to look forward to the best of what's ahead in 2019 with our run-down of the 10 best indie-friendly comic conventions that we are looking forward to this year.

### True Believers Comic Festival 2019 (2nd February)

The traditional season opener, this one-dayer in Cheltenham has been moved from it's traditional locale at the race course, but we hope this won't put it off it's pace, as it is consistently one of the best run and most enjoyable days on the comics calendar.

### Portsmouth Comic Con (4-5th May)

Now in it's second year, this event run in conjunction with our friends at Tripwire, is set to feature an exciting mix of big name guests (including DC's Liam Sharp making a rare UK appearance), along with the best indie creators from the south of England.

### MCM London (24th-26th May)

The daddy of them all. Even though the emphasis is on big name creators (and TV and movies), the MCM Artist's Alley is still one of the most exciting line ups of comic creators you will see all year.

### Lawless - A Celebration of British Comics (18th May)

Formerly the Dredd and 2000 AD focused Law Giver, this year's event in Bristol will mix in a wider UK comics focus along with a tribute to the late great Carlos Ezquerra.

### ELCAF (7th-9th June)

The East London Comics Art Fair is the focal point for the artier end of the small press spectrum. More like an art school end of year show than a comic con, it's an enlightening day out.

### Glasgow Comic Con (29 June)

Part of the ever-growing Scottish comic scene, this event is now in it's 9th year and features over 150 exhibitors, including the creators from BHP Comics who are co-organisers.

### ICE Birmingham (31st August)

The 'coolest' event on the comics calendar, this Midlands based event mixes big names from the UK scene with family friendly atmosphere.

(Be sure to check out their star-studded Brighton event in March)

### Thought Bubble Festival (September 2019)

The Glastonbury of Comics, and the epicentre of the UK comics scene. With more indie creators per square foot than at any time of the year, and many launching new titles, this really is the main event for indie comics!

### Nottingham Comic Con (TBC)

Following up a stellar 2018 show, thanks to an exclusive appearance from Hilda creator Luke Pearson and the Nobrow team, let's hope they have something as equally impressive up their sleeve for this year's event!

### Your Local Small Press Event

Whether it is a small press signing in your local comic shop, or a comic festival in your local town hall or library or a full blown convention, then be sure to support your local comics community, as without them there won't be a UK Comics scene!

"A sweaty and sinister read that will keep you guessing about who is the ultimate evil"

# These Savage Shores

**Publisher:** Vault Comics
**Writer:** Ram V
**Artist:** Sumit Kumar, Vittorio Astone
**Price:** £2.49 from ComiXology

**Based in 18th century India, writer Ram V continues to build his excellent résumé with this tale of vampires and shape changers in a pre-colonial world. But it's much more than just another Dracula and Van Helsing story.**

These Savage Shores is one of those books which benefits from being set in a unique and fresh location (at least, a fresh for western comics readers!). Instead of being set in grim and foggy London or Transylvania, the story is set in the exotic and mystical Calicut which means jewelled elephants and jaguars fill the pages rather than black cabs and black coats of London. The story is a slowly simmering pot boiler that involves vampire hunters, demigod bodyguards, exotic dancers and the sinister East India Company. The various elements begin to come together and create a mix of Gothic horror and eastern mysticism that are both incredibly dense and brilliantly realized.

The denseness of story is helped by artist Sumit Kumar whose immaculately crafted pages reminded us Liam Sharp's Wonder Woman, or Chris Wildgoose's Porcelain, for it's incredible detail. Whether it is the immaculately rigged sail ships, the swarming cityscapes or the lush forest canopys, every panel is packed with exquisite detail and the character design feels completely unique and original thanks to this intricate approach.

This is another stellar outing from Ram V and team, and a sign that he is definitely an exciting writer to watch - not to mention another winner from Vault Comics. A sweaty and sinister read that will keep you guessing about who is the ultimate evil throughout.

# Darwin: An Exceptional Voyage

**Publisher:** Nobrow
**Writer:** Fabian Grolleau
**Artist:** Jeremie Royer
**Price:** £16.99 from nobrow.net

**Fabian Grolleau and Jeremie Royer's follow up to 2017's Audubon: On The Wings of the World, continues the same beautiful and thought provoking look at the history of a prominent naturalist, but this time it's the slightly more well known Charles Darwin.**

Chronicling his life is no easy task, and so Grolleau and Royer have chosen to focus on the early part and his journey on the HMS Beagle during which he began to formulate his ground breaking theory of evolution. This allows them to create a very personal and intimate look at a man learning about the world around him. Darwin is cast as both an impartial observer taking in the world around him, but also one whose enlightened gaze is reflected back on his own society, looking at how a civilised world can be still be as flawed and judgemental as a supposed savage one. This moral complexity allows Darwin to be a very subtle and thoughtful read as it avoids the lazy colonial clichés that it could rely on.

As with Audubon, Jeremie Royer's artwork is utterly sublime and perhaps even more gorgeous this time around. His classical Euro style has the expressive faces of a classic bande desinée, mixed with some beautifully rendered land and seascapes, especially in the map-like chapter breaks and epic double page spreads.

While Audubon was a delightfully beautiful curiosity, Darwin feels like a much more accessible and so more rewarding read for a wider audience. A truly wondrous discovery that is a sublime and thoughtful book packed full of utter brilliance.

# Friendo

**Publisher:** Vault Comics
**Writer:** Alex Paknadel
**Artist:** Martin Simmonds, Dee Cunniffe, Taylor Esposito
**Price:** £2.49 from ComiXology

**Writer Alex Paknadel manages to smartly capture the digital assistant Zeitgeist, while giving it a Black Mirror style future-phobic slant.**

Down on his luck actor Leo gets more than he bargains for when his girlfriend gets him a new digital assistant called Jerry who sets him off on a path of debt-fuelled debauchery and destruction.

Artist Martin Simmonds continues his outstanding work to give the book an outrageous and unique art style, aided by a neon sheen to the colours from Dee Cunniffe.

Although it's a bit of a slow burner with a lot of plot threads to get into motion, once you are into it, Friendo has that anarchic and maniacal streak which we love. It's backed up by some very smart and thought provoking story-telling that has the potential to grow into something really interesting. So if you're finding yourself becoming a bit too pally with your Alexa then take heed, because Friendo is that nightmare digital buddy that the world has been warning us all about!

# The Stone King

**Publisher:** ComiXology
**Writer:** Kel McDonald
**Artist:** Tyler Crook
**Price:** £1.99 from ComiXology

**A young pickpocket gets more than she bargains for when she steals a giant ruby from the back of the enigmatic Stone King himself (who is like a rocky Tree Beard meets The Iron Giant).**

This simple summation doesn't do justice to this wonderful new book from the comiXology originals stable. Writer Kel McDonald and artist Tyler Crook have built this wonderfully rocky world for their characters to live in, and it's brought to life by some utterly sumptuous artwork from Crook, who uses this beautiful digitally painted style to give every panel, even the lettering, the granular, textured feel of rock and stone. From the opening scenes that see our protagonist Ave climb on to the lumbering Stone King in a wordless action sequence that is as thrilling as it is beautiful, you know you are in for something really special. Although the scenes in the city feel fairly formulaic and like the kind we have seen in stories like Paradiso, it is the book's epic ending, that really helps it to stand out.

It's also interesting to see a gender neutral lead in Ave, who is designed to look like a boy, but described as a girl and this along with some other subtle nuances to the story, leave us asking plenty of questions ready for issue two. A stunning debut and the best comiXology Original yet!

# Nasty Girls

**Publisher:** Cult Empire Comics
**Writer:** Erin Keepers
**Artist:** Catriona Laird, Gaby Epstein
**Price:** £11.99 from tictail.com/cultempirecomics

**Hard-hitting rock 'n' roll gets a whole new meaning in this high energy tale of pop punk vigilantes from Cult Empire Comics, the team behind Lady Hollywood.**

Nasty Girls sees an all-girl garage band turn into ass-kicking vigilantes when they have one bad gig too many and their violent on-stage antics go viral. Hired by a fan to beat up an angry uncle, it's the making of the group and their bad girl antics see them get a new manager and a new spark of success.

Nasty Girls reads like Gem and The Holograms meets Kick Ass with it's mix of high energy, all-girl musical mayhem and back street beatings. There are also a few shades of Brian K Vaughan's Paper Girls in there for good measure too. It's an interesting idea for a comic about a band, and is certainly a fresh take on this well trodden genre. While it may appear to have a violent core to it, Nasty Girls never quite goes as dark as you think it might, which is definitely a good thing and makes it a much more enjoyable book as a result.

This is a solid debut and a fun and feisty first issue that will definitely make you think twice about heckling a band in your local bar!

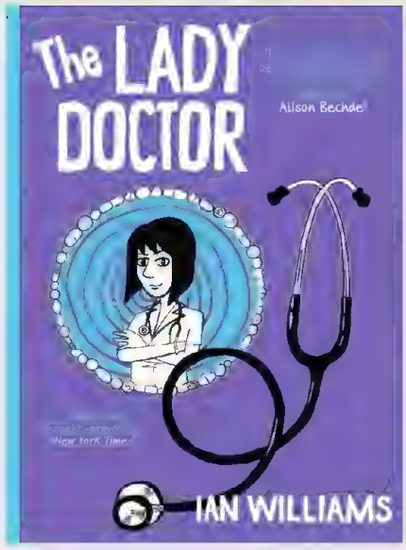
# The Lady Doctor

**Publisher:** Myriad Editions
**Writer/Artist:** Ian Williams
**Price:** £14.99 from the Myriad Editions Store

**A mix of outlandishly funny tales about life in the NHS with an undercurrent of real emotional pathos, that reminds us how human our doctors really are.**

The Lady Doctor has that classic English graphic novel feel we love in the work of Posy Simmonds. It lilts and meanders along at a very careful pace, allowing the characters and dialogue to shine. The story builds quietly and confidently, mixing laugh out loud stories from Lois' time in the sexual health clinic, through to the emotional roller-coaster that comes when reconnecting with her estranged mother.

While it might not have the quirky cool of some small press books, The Lady Doctor is a thoroughly absorbing read that benefits from not being too flashy or faddy. Instead it relies on solidly realised, beautifully crafted characters who drive the story along and make it both entertaining and thought-provoking too. A book which is definitely worth the price of a prescription.

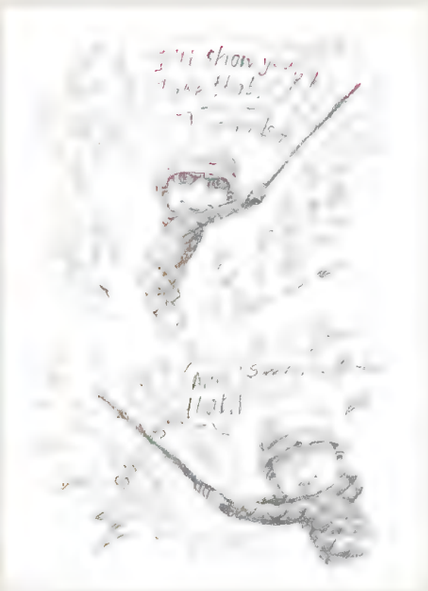


# "When I look back to growing up there was always a feeling of a bogey man somewhere."

## **Rachael Ball** talks about the personal inspirations in Wolf

**Wolf follows a family coping with the loss of a father, it feels very personal, was it based on your own life?**
**RB:** The story is based on the death of my father when I was 6. He died suddenly in the night of a heart attack. I wanted to tell the story of how children respond to grief. There's an idea that kids don't feel death like adults do. But kids are living in the present so much they don't deal with it in the same way as adults. I wanted to look at that loss and I also to give my Dad something.

**It is set in the summers of 1976 and 1977, was this period setting part of a personal link to the story?**
**RB:** He died in 1970. It was important to me to relive that period when telling the story and to evoke that period. Firstly so that I was there again to make the story authentic and to access the real feelings, things and references from that time. I was very conscious of trying to convey the shock of loss even at such a young age and making it real to the time period was part of that. I also thought that it would help people who had lived through the 70's connect with the story if they had the same references to relate to.
When I look back to growing up there was always a feeling of a bogey man somewhere. Someone we thought of as an intriguing but terrifying figure who maybe lived nearby. I liked the idea of taking such a figure and making them central to the story.



Wolf was inspired by Rachael's own experiences of childhood grief in the 1970s.

**The idea of kids creating stories around a mysterious neighbour is a really interesting one. Was this again based on your own experiences?**
**RB:** I can remember a time when we went caravanning... I think it was to Hutton Roof in Cumbria. My friends played a joke on me and left a note on the ground outside the caravan from some men talking about 'watching us' and 'coming to get us!' etc. I got really scared and kept watching out for them all the time. They tried to convince me that it was a joke. I wouldn't believe them and I can still remember the total fear I experienced all the time.

**The artwork is fantastic and we love your pencil drawn style. Can you tell us a bit about your process?**
**RB:** I'm not a meticulous thumbnailer Although I may be on my next book! I'm probably a more fluid planner. The pencilling felt right for my last books. They had a starkness (which was appropriate for The Inflatable Woman), and created a sense of nostalgia which was perfect for Wolf. I just love the simplicity and subtlety you can create with a pencil.

**You can pick up Wolf from www.selfmadehero.com**

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# Terrible Means

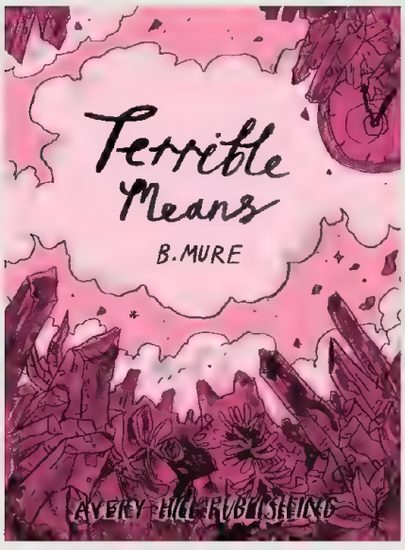
**Publisher:** Avery Hill Publishing
**Writer/Artist:** B. Mure
**Price:** £8.99 from AveryHill.BigCartel.com

**The follow up to 2017's Ismyre, continues to build more depth and layers into the curious and quirky mythology of this wonderfully weird watercolour world.**

The world of Ismyre is a glorious one, filled with doomed scientists, frustrated government bureaucrats and frustrated magicians. Every character is packed full of quirks and foibles, neuroses and nuances, that makes them so much more interesting that your average cookie cutter hero. While the world they habit is intensely and intellectually curated to perfection.

B's artwork is a mix of scratchy pen and ink line work with lush watercolour washes that create unconventional rainbows of colour on every page. At times the rawness of some of these pages can cause the book to feel a bit chaotic, but it is one of those books where you have to forgive the minor quibbles as to remove them would be to take out the heart and soul of the book.

A truly unique and wonderful read that manages to balance mainstream indie readability with small press smarts and cool.



# 24 Panels

**Publisher:** Image Comics
**Writer:** Various
**Artist:** Various
**Price:** $16.99 from the Image Comics Digital Store

**Complied by Wicked and Divine creator Kieron Gillen, with proceeds going to survivors of the Grenfell Tower fire, 24 Panels features an all star roster of creators alongside some of the best of the UK small press.**

With the stories limited to just 24 panels (hence the name!) they are a mixed bunch, both thematically and in terms of style. The over arching themes are hope, community, positivity and positivity, which means we get everything from, thought pieces like Gillen and Sean Azzopardi's opener, through to nostalgic childhood tales like Mike Garley's excellent The Fort or Trevor Boyd's Fruit Punch. There's even room for a bit of supernatural horror with Laurie Penny and Gavin Mitchell's Human Child and a bit of rural magic in Leigh Alexander and Tom Humberstone's Heath Magic, all of which may at seem out of place for this kind of book, but this diversity is one of 24 Panels' real strengths.

It's difficult to pick a true stand out, but Alex de Campi, Ro Stein and Ted Brandt's They Say has to be a contender with it's innovative use of double page spreads featuring a block of flats as cutaways and the story being told throughout the residents of the building.

Perhaps the most talked about before publication was Alan Moore's poem If Einstein's Right which savages politicians like Bullingdon Boy Boris, while juxtaposing it with the real people of Grenfell. One of only a few to directly address the politics of Grenfell, it's thoughtful and poignant piece that is brought to life by beautiful artwork from Melinda Debbie.

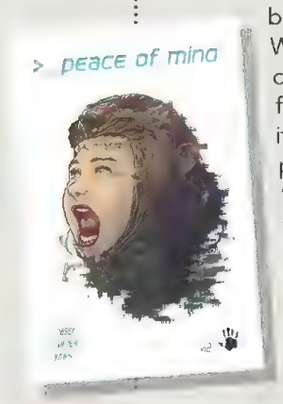
With it's eclectic mix of innovative story-telling, compelling narratives, and some sumptuous art 24 Panels is a book that is as thought provoking and passionate as it is readable. A worthy tribute to the survivors of such a horrific tragedy.

# SMALL PRESS SPOTLIGHT

## Aliens,demons & tentacled beasties in our horror round-up

Dregs: A Short Story Collection is a collection of short stories from London Horror Comic editor John-Paul Kamath which looks at some of the darker elements of the world, in a series of quite adult themed one off stories. It starts with two sons visiting their fathers gravestone in One For The Road, before telling a tale of childhood trauma and adult recriminations in Hero's Journey, before wrapping up with the costume party from hell (quite literally) in Nun's And Monsters. Of the three stories this is the stand out by some distance and feels like it could have been part of Madius Comics' Horrere collection with it's mix of acerbic humour, monstrous creatures and quirky concepts (A Cthulu bride anyone?!). With a cover from Simon Myers that reminded us a bit of Mike Allred's work in Kevin Smith's Chasing Amy, it helps give the whole book a slightly lo-fi and old school fanzine feel that sits well with its title. **Get Dregs for £8 from londonhorrorcomic.com**

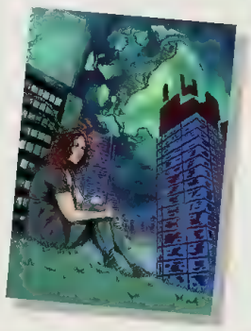
The first issue of Peace of Mind introduced us to a world of cyberpunk dystopian sci fi that felt like a Matrix reboot and it's eye catching white cover was a real stand out. This second issue builds on the premise of the first, which saw a group of workers living in the sewers rescue a young woman who has been ejected from a high-tech VR system. It really begins to expand the story, rather than focus just on the mysterious woman who is rescued in issue #1. Thanks for a series of flashbacks it introduces to characters back stories as well as new elements of the overall world around them too. We also look deeper into just why they are there in the sewers and why they want to help, which helps make the heroes into much more identifiable characters. Visually it looks incredible, and while artist Correa's work was pretty good in the first issue, it has really levelled up in this second volume with the work feeling more orthodox, but much more polished and slick as a result. It reminded us a bit of the excellent Paradiso in it's intricacy. With a cliffhanger that is set to reveal even more of the world of Peace of Mind, this is a really smart and ambitious piece of small press sci-fi that has the potential to be something very special.




**Peace of Mind #2 will return to Kickstarter in 2019**

When a struggling artist becomes a tattooist (or scratcher), she gets more than she bargains for as her customers become possessed by their ink and head out on bloodthirsty rampages! Writer John Ward has created a fantastic concept for this ongoing comic as it can be read like a police procedural and have a 'freak of the week' quality to it, making each issue feel fresh and original, while still keeping an overall story arc. Artist Juan Romera gives the whole thing a Charlie Adlard-esque mix of monochrome blood and guts but with great facial expressions and characterisation, giving the book a really smartness to it and without veering off into the more outlandish areas that many indie horror books head. It's definitely not a book for all ages and Romera revels in the blood and guts side of things, but it's not the only thing the book has going for it as the characters are what make you keep reading. **Purchase Scratcher #1-3 from ComiXology**

Tales of Fractured World is a new anthology from Roddy McCance, whose Tales of A Fractured Mind was a really interesting look at issues of mental health. This is a similar themed collection that this time looks at the subject of environmentalism through science fiction. It's an interesting mix of stories from tales like: Earthbreaker which is about a man charged with preparing a new world for the human race; through to Violet about a young girls' attempts to find her father during an environmental disaster. With an eclectic roster of artists bringing their own unique styles to each story, (especially Cathedral On Fire) this is strong collection of sci-fi tales, although one that perhaps loses sight of it's intended message a bit too often. **You can pick up Tales of A Fractured World from fracturepress.bigcartel.com**



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# "There's none of the tedious posturing and do-gooding you get in most comics"

**Monty Nero** on why Death Sentence isn't your average capes comic!

Monty Nero and Martin Simmonds' sex, drugs and superpowers series Death Sentence: Liberty Girl is back with a new series on Kickstarter. We find out the secrets of the world of G-Plus and talk to the creator itself – the man behind the mayhem, Monty Nero.

**For those new to the world of Death Sentence, can you give us a quick catch up on what it's all about?**
**Monty Nero:** It's about a sexually transmitted virus that kills you in six months but gives you superpowers. So what would you do if you could do anything in that time? We see how it affects three ordinary people: Verity, a frustrated artist, Weasel, a rock star, and Roots, a drug dealer. They all start to do amazing things, transforming their lives. Then there's Jeb, who's an undercover FBI agent trying to discover more about the virus. After the first issue, which is epic action, things get pretty freaky and dark.

**The concept of a superhero virus that is caught rather than gained and also gives those with powers**

**a limited life span, really gives the book a unique twist on the superhero genre. Was this the initial spark for Death Sentence?**

**MN:** Yeah, the most original thing about Death Sentence is the whole approach. The tone. The way the characters look and act, like you or I would. There's none of this tedious posturing and do-gooding you get in most superhero comics. But it's not cynical either. It's just funny, dark, and real.

The spark was just that horrible feeling that you're running out of time and there's so much left undone. Everyone feels that. We're all dying, slowly. It's an acute dramatisation of our essential dilemma as humans. That's why it resonates with people.

**You're bringing this new series to Kickstarter rather than publish it via Titan Comics, why is that?**

**MN:** The first series was made independently and Titan picked it up later. They did a great job initially but that wild rock 'n' roll spirit has always been integral to our ethos. It's why the comic's so damn good. Me and Martin work at all the subtle storytelling details, I edit it, we do exactly what we want, and the results speak for themselves.

**Death Sentence isn't afraid to have a bit of adult content and lives up to its sex, drugs and superpowers mantra. Do you find you can push the boundaries a bit further when self-publishing it?**

**MN:** My only interest is in reflecting the real world. You get plasterer's living the rock n roll lifestyle these days, financial analysts, salesmen! I was shocked people thought the first series was out there. There is a lot of satirical exaggeration in Death Sentence, but only to expose the sordid truth. God knows the world is fucked right now, it's important to have characters who acknowledge that. What to do about it is the question. Verity's got a few ideas.

**Artist Martin Simmonds has had a stellar year with books like Punks Not Dead and Friendo, but it looks like he has saved his best for Death Sentence? What is it about Martin's work that seems to suit the world of Death Sentence so well?**

**MN:** This is his greatest work, I think. You get periods in artists' lives where their knowledge and skill and enthusiasm and opportunity all reach an apex and Martin's going through that phase here. To read his work is to read an artist revelling in the art of storytelling – stretching himself for the sheer joy of it. Issue 2 is mind-blowingly beautiful. And issue 3 raises the bar further. Comic fans would be upset to miss this. I'm just enjoying the ride like everyone else.

**Death Sentence has always felt quite political and satirical, but has the tone shifted in the past few years as the world has got more crazy and far-fetched?**

**MN:** The first book was very much a satire about the horrors of the Noughties when the garden seemed very rosy. It wasn't set then, but that was the theme. The second book was more a reaction to what was happening as we made Death Sentence in that second decade of the 21st Century, the London riots, the politics. The third book starts to look more forward, and by the end of the series we'll be trying to find a path out of this current madness.

**Death Sentence: Liberty Girl will return to Kickstarter in 2019. Find out more about Monty's work at www.montynero.com and pick up volumes 1 & 2 of Death Sentence via Monty's online store.**

Alongside regular artist Martin Simmonds, #3 features a cover from Marvel's Luke Ross

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# THE LAST WORD

with **Pat Mills**

# LIFE AFTER LAW

A couple of years ago DC Comics pulled the plug on their proposed Marshal Law/Batman crossover. Yes, I know it sounds unlikely that a conservative comic corporation should even consider such a team-up, but they seemed quite serious at the time. They suggested the crossover to Kevin O'Neill and myself and we readily agreed. The prospect of the Marshal Law fox getting in with those superhero chickens was just too good an opportunity to miss. Contracts were duly signed and my preliminary synopsis was approved. But in the end, though, after further consideration, DC decided it was not the direction they wanted Gotham's finest to go, after all. We were not really that surprised or heart-broken by the cancellation which we had already predicted. We had expected it to happen when they saw my full script or Kevin's art and realized just what they had let themselves in for. And, after all, we had already produced a story on vigilantes of the night in Marshal Law's Kingdom of the Blind. So the fox had already been in the chicken coop

Even so, if it had gone ahead, the crossover would have been Marshal Law's swan song or should that be 'bat squeak'? Because there is zero likelihood that we will ever return to Law again, I am sorry to say. 'Law meets Batman' was intended to be our final bow. Entitled 'Batricide', it featured a villain called 'The Transporter' who is mentally and dimensionally unstable and pursues and kills Batman across infinite Earths, transporting them back to San Futuro. In this alternative reality, Bruce's father, Thomas Wayne, is still alive and is the merchant of death responsible for the carnage of the Zone. The Transporter warns Thomas he must find a cure for his cellular degeneracy or Bruce and his loved ones will die a thousand times. As he puts pressure on dad, we are greeted by the appalling sight of a mountain of dead Batmen, not to mention an equally impressive heap of dead Robins and Alfreds materialising in his asylum cell in San Futuro. (Plus one or two of Bruce's girlfriends.)

You get the idea. My favorite scene was one where Thomas was raising money at a gala charity event so that every war orphan – in

a war he had instigated and profited from - would have his own bat kite and could pretend to be a super hero.

As you can see, there is still not the remotest whiff of homage to men in tights in Law. Like the Marshal, I believe super heroes have so diluted and debased the meaning of the word 'hero', and the values it should stand for, as to render it meaningless in the dictionary. Yet I'm still baffled why anyone should look up to billionaires who wage war on the poor whilst claiming to protect them. I guess it's social conditioning and this explains why, when Kingdom of the Blind was first published, several of my peers in the comic industry thought its savage critique of its Batman-style villain was 'mean-spirited'. Similarly, when I was recently pleased to see the passing of George H. Bush, of the mega-wealthy Bush family, the man responsible for the first round of mass-murder in Iraq, that, too, was seen by friends as 'mean-spirited'.

Looking up to these super-rich felons, when we really should be looking down on them, derives originally from being carefully brainwashed with a long tradition of fictional aristocratic heroes on our own side of the pond. Such as the Scarlet Pimpernel who saves his fellow super-rich oppressors from the vengeance of the people.

But I'm equally baffled why there are so few working class heroes in comics, outside the pages of 2000AD. Here, in comics, free of old Etonian censorship so commonplace in mainstream media, we have a chance to show true heroes and genuine struggles against oppression, whether it's with robots like ABC Warriors, warriors like Slaine, or alien freedom fighters like Nemesis.

So saying goodbye to Marshal Law, a blue collar worker by day and vigilante by night, I have to admit was a wrench. Writing the series was a cathartically satisfying experience showing the super-rich as the sociopaths, criminals and oppressors so many of them really are. If you still believe in the wealthy grinning clowns featured in Hello magazine, check out the TV series Trust about the Gettys, one of America's richest and most wretched families. Their scandals are not unique; they're just the only ones out of the closet. The others shroud themselves in darker cloaks than Batman, retreat into the shadows, and wisely hide their activities from public scrutiny. But the Gettys are what the Waynes would really be like, rather than the unconvincing, syrupy image we're endlessly served up with. Marshal Law was the perfect vehicle to challenge the propaganda and self-aggrandizement of the super-rich. I went for it on every mean-spirited opportunity I could. And there were so many more I could have dressed in the veneer of the super hero and written about, for instance the Kennedys, the Du Ponts, Branson and the Bushes. Yes, I'm so going to miss Law.

But there are ways of coping with my withdrawal symptoms. The hero has a thousand faces after all and Law's gimp mask can be replaced with another face with similar motivation. One such character is Dave Maudling, the protagonist of my Read Em and Weep novel series who intends to kill a TV celebrity who harms children. The moment in Book Three when he finally catches up with this TV 'national treasure' will be cathartic indeed.

And then there's an assassin text novel series I'm planning to write later in 2019. This vigilante kills elite traitors who betray their country with the whole-hearted support of the British state. His executions may be fiction, but the chilling facts that inspire them are a matter of record. Rather than a gimp mask, he dons a World War One gas mask to carry out his valuable work.

Both are 'hero' hunters, they hunt 'heroes'. And, like Marshal Law, they will never find any.

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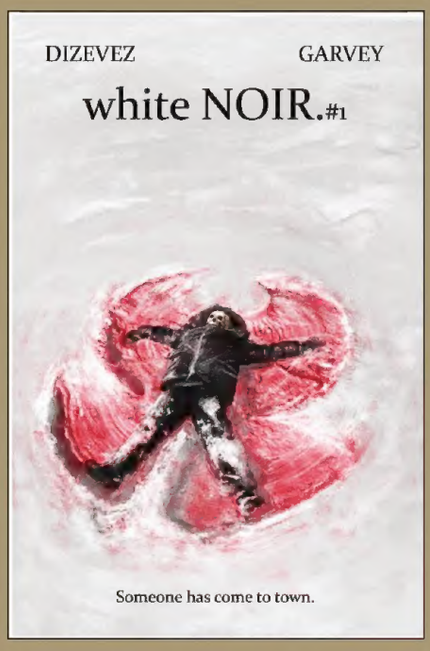


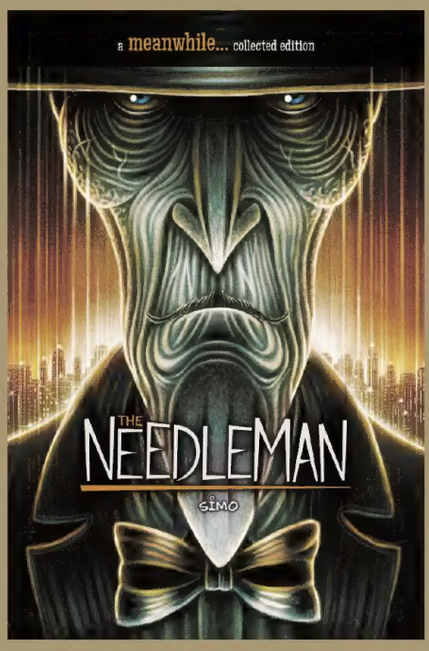


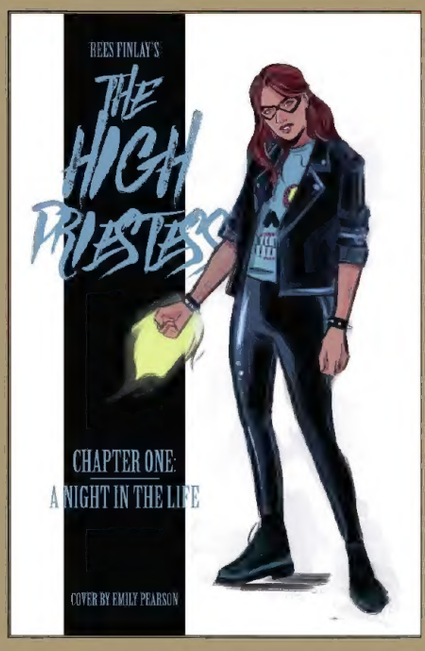

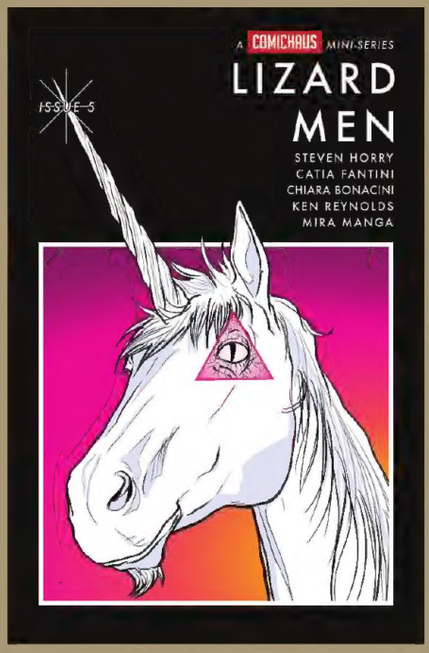

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